

**Commissioners Present:** Marcia Merrill, Chair; Laine Akiyama, Sharon Baade, Gretchen Bailey, Eileen Boland, Cary Brown, Carol Buchdahl, Mary Claire Carroll, Retta Dunlap, Ruth Finn, Linda Fogg, Cathy Frey, Anne McClaughry, and Marion Milne.

**Commissioners Absent:** Karen Henry, and Vicky Young.

**Advisory Council Members Present:** Joanne Brooking representing Central Vermont Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Maggie Gendron from Senator Leahy's office, Barbara Hannon representing Older Women's League, Lindy Hatcher representing Vermont Federation of Business and Professional Women, Linda Ingold representing Vermont Women's Business Center, Margaret Luce representing Vermont State Nurses Association, Barbara Saunders representing Child Care Fund of Vermont, and Carol Story representing the Girl Scout Council of Vermont.

**Staff:** Janet Bullard, Wendy Love, and Lilly Talbert.

**Presiding:** Marcia Merrill

**Recording:** Janet Bullard

Meeting called to order at 9:30 a.m. by Chair Marcia Merrill.

### **Welcome from the Chair/Introductions/Announcements/Minutes**

Marcia reported that, as everyone knows, there has been much controversy in the media regarding the two new lines of Burton snowboards. She invited everyone present to respond to the following two questions: how do you feel personally about the new Burton snowboards and do you think the Commission should issue a formal response--yes or no.?

Commissioners and advisors shared their thoughts around this issue.

### **Minutes**

Motion made by Marion Milne to accept the minutes of the September 10, 2008 commission meeting as submitted. Seconded by Carol Buchdahl and voted unanimously.

### **FY10 Budget Crisis – Jack Hoffman, Public Assets Institute**

Marion Milne, a board member of the Public Assets Institute, introduced Jack Hoffman. The Public Assets Institute, formed by Paul Cillo in 2003, supports democracy by helping Vermonters understand and keep informed about how their state government is raising and spending money and using other public assets. The Institute sees itself as a non-partisan source of state tax and budget analysis. There are approximately 37 similar organizations in other states.

The institute focuses primarily on education, health care, and family economic security. The bigger mission is to try to get people to restart the conversation on the proper role of government. Jack noted that there is a deficiency in the support for public structures, not just roads and bridges, but court system, law enforcement, public welfare in the broadest terms. For about thirty-four years people have been hearing that government is the problem not the solution. The Public Assets Institute doesn't subscribe to that theory.

Jack gave an overview of the state's budget of approximately 35 billion dollars divided as follows: education (35%), health care- Medicaid (28%), transportation (3%), corrections (3%), natural resources (3%), and miscellaneous items (28%).

About 30% of our budget is federal funds, 28 % is in the general fund, 24% is in the education fund, 5% in special funds, 5% in transportation funds, and about 8% in a few smaller funds.

On the revenue side, the General fund (a little over a billion dollars) comes from personal income tax (50%), sales tax (20%), rooms and meals tax (10%), corporate taxes (5%) and various taxes and fees (15%). Vermont has a very progressive income tax, as income goes up, so do taxes.

Jack explained that as a result of the revenue projection downgrades this summer, the FY'09 budget was revised downward to the FY'08 budget level.

Based on current information, the FY'10 budget gap is anywhere from \$102-120 million. As follows:

General Fund \$42 million

Medicaid \$38-\$48 million

Low-Income Heat Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) \$20 million

Teacher's retirement (statutory funding requirement) \$2-10 million

Ongoing unresolved issues include: one-time and federal funds increasingly used for ongoing expenses, a tax structure that is not aligned with economic activity, and skyrocketing health care and energy costs. Jack stated that we should look at spending in a larger context, and not isolate various sources of revenue.

Public Assets Institute would like to see a current services budget that would show how much it would cost to do what we are doing now incorporating known changes such as caseload increases, utility price increases, etc. This type of budgeting would give an honest estimate of what it is going to cost with inflation to maintain current level of service for the coming year.

Commissioners discussed the budget and revenue details and asked questions of Jack. Mary Claire recommended that the commission be kept current on the funding status of issues of interest to the commission such as the childcare subsidy, and where the Commission's voice should be heard. Wendy stated that the Commission, could at any time, write letters to legislators regarding our stance on particular line items in the proposed budget. Marcia suggested that the budget discussion be taken up at another meeting to give some time for thought on what kind of impact, if any, the Commission could/should have on the state's budget.

### Burton Snowboard Discussion continued

Marcia asked for ideas on what, if anything, the Commission should do regarding this issue. After some discussion, a number of suggestions were brought forth: work with other organizations to bring economic sanctions against Burton; talk with the Vermont Ski Areas Association and major recreation areas about posting signs that state that objectionable messages on t-shirts, snowboards etc aren't allowed; work with other organizations, like the White Ribbon Campaign, and also the Olympic Commission to explore possible actions.

Marcia asked for a small group to formulate some possible avenues of action. Carol, Ruth, Linda Ingold, Anne, Lindy, Mary Claire, and Eileen all volunteered. Marcia asked Anne to chair/facilitate the conversation of the task force; Anne will get back in touch with Marcia to let her know if she will chair the task force.

### Legislative Luncheon Update

Marcia asked Laine, Chair of the Legislative Luncheon Committee, to give an update on the luncheon. Laine reviewed that the luncheon will be held on Wednesday, January 14, 2009 right after the commission meeting from 12:00 noon – 1:30 p.m. in the Governor's Ballroom at the Capitol Plaza. The theme of the luncheon will be "We are all pieces of the puzzle." There will be a quiz of attendees and as legislators answer the questions correctly, they will receive a puzzle piece and also a piece of chocolate made by a local female entrepreneur. At the end of the quiz, all puzzle holders will come up to the front of the ballroom and put the puzzle together, to spell out, "Strong women, strong families, strong communities, strong economy." (Or in whatever order makes sense to them.)

Invitations will be sent out by Friday, November 7<sup>th</sup>. RSVP's for the luncheon are due December 1 and after that Janet will in contacting commissioners and advisors to follow up with invitees who have not responded.

### Virtual Strike in Support of Quality Childcare

Lilly distributed buttons commemorating a virtual strike in support of quality childcare and asked people to take as many as they want to distribute to others. The strike started yesterday and goes through the 18<sup>th</sup>. The strike is sponsored by Kids are Priority One and many sister organizations who support quality childcare. The purpose of the virtual strike is to increase public and employer awareness of the number of workers who depend on quality childcare.

### Plus/Delta

What worked? - no break out groups, having Marion back, thoughtful input from everyone on the Burton snowboard issue, and a substantive presentation.

What didn't work? Nothing! Comment: Saddest part of the meeting was hearing that the high school girl scouts who are legislative interns felt that they couldn't bring a voice to the Burton Snowboard issue because they have grown up confronting this culture issue everyday.

Meeting adjourned at 12:30