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Lt. governor candidate makes stop in Bennington County

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By Tyler Lederer

Patricia Preston is running for the Democratic nomination for Lieutenant Governor.

BENNINGTON - On Friday, May 6, Democratic candidate for lieutenant governor Patricia Preston visited Bennington County on the campaign trail. She is one of four candidates who are running under the party so far.

Preston is running because she believes “in the promise of Vermont,” she said. “And I feel as though we are leaving people in rural communities behind in the progress and prosperity that they so desperately deserve.”

Not having held political office before, Preston describes herself as “a fresh voice to Montpelier” and part of the next generation of leaders. She also noted that representation matters and Vermont has only ever had four female lieutenant governors. “I think it’s important to have women at the table,” she said.

Preston enters the race from her previous position as president and CEO at the Vermont Council of World Affairs. She also has an extensive teaching background, teaching at Burlington High School, Mount Mansfield Winter Academy, and other locations around the state as well as in 45 countries. She is originally from Randolph, where she lived on a dairy farm, and currently resides in Burlington.

Her background is why she believes in “civil discourse,” or bringing diverse groups of people together in discussion, as a way to address Vermont’s problems. “My work at the Vermont Council is rooted deeply in civil discourse,” she said. “We bring people together from all political parties, all backgrounds, all areas and regions of the state, both urban and rural. We bring them to the table to discuss Vermont’s most pressing issues.”

When the COVID-19 pandemic began, she said, all the issues she was discussing before were exacerbated. She knew then she wanted to run for office and affect policy change.

While Americans are more divided politically than ever, Preston said she will continue to host forums like the ones the Vermont Council does now. She believes that demonstrating good civil discourse can prove that it works and that it could help with the country’s democracy.

“When I’m teaching a student, you demonstrate, you model,” she said. “Or a parent, you’re modeling behavior you want for your child. I’m going to model what good civil discourse looks like and I’m bringing people from around the entire state to the table to do that too.”

During her time in Bennington, she held a meet-and-greet at the Coffee Bar and talked with the Bennington Coalition for the Homeless. She then went to Manchester to visit Burr and Burton Academy, before heading back to Bennington to meet with people from the DREAM program, which offers mentoring to children.

Her biggest takeaway from these visits, she said, is that her priorities align with those of people in the area. “It’s reaffirming and understanding that my priorities align with the priorities of folks in Bennington County,” she said. “That really matters to me because, when I become lieutenant governor, I’m lieutenant governor for every Vermonter across the state and I want to accurately represent and reflect that, even in this campaign.”

Preston has three main priorities, all interconnected. The first is “strengthening rural communities” through increasing workforce opportunities. Preston said there are many ways the state can do that, such as through educational programs or tech centers. It was important for her to note that people need to be supported even after they enter the workforce.

Preston also cited affordable housing and child care as a way of improving the workforce, which ties into her second main priority of “affordability.” She said a lack of affordable housing is one of the reasons rural communities struggle to have a workforce. “We need to find affordable housing in the state, either repurposing structures that already exist or building new housing,” she said.

Preston also said that, during the pandemic, a lack of affordable child care caused women to leave the workforce. She said getting affordable and accessible child care to women would allow them to reenter it.

Preston’s last main priority is “climate.” She hopes to build a green economy, which would include things such as green technology, weatherising houses or creating jobs in renewable energy. She is also interested in a training program so people could join these industries.

As for policy positions, while she was not familiar with S.287, the student weighting reform bill, Preston said education funding was a high priority for her. When discussing incidents of racism in local public schools, she also said she had a “zero tolerance policy” for racism and discrimination.

She also says she is an advocate for abortion rights and that it meant a lot to her to have been recently endorsed by a pro-choice organization. “I believe in the autonomy of a woman to make decisions around her body and her health care or reproductive rights,” she said. “I am a strong supporter and advocate of anything to do with passing Prop. 5 and legislation coming this November.”

Preston will compete against Rep. Charlie Kimbell, former Rep. Kitty Toll, and former Lt. Gov. David Zuckerman in the August primary. Those interested in following or volunteering for her campaign can do so at www.patriciaforvermont.com.

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PATRICIA PRESTON

DEMOCRATIC

PRIMARY

The Deerfield Valley News

797 VT Route 100 North

Wilmington, VT 05363

Phone: 802-464-3388

Fax: 802-464-7255

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