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**Tuesday April 14, 2009**

**Hanna: Acting in leadership**

By *Cheryl Hanna*

(HOST) Commentator Cheryl Hanna is a professor at Vermont Law School and a member of the Council for the Future of Vermont. She's been thinking about Vermont's potential to be a leader in these turbulent times.

(HANNA) I know that for many Vermonters these are dark days. With the deepening recession and other challenges, many are worried about their own futures, as well as the future of the state.

Yet I remain optimistic. Over the last eighteen months, the Council for the Future of Vermont has gathered input from thousands of Vermonters. For me, as a member of the Council, it's been an amazing and unprecedented process. We recently presented our findings to leaders in Montpelier, and we'll soon be hosting a state-wide summit, as well as returning to local communities to share what we learned.

The Council found that Vermonters share a very powerful positive belief in the state. Vermont isn't just about where we live, but how we live, and what we collectively aspire to accomplish as a people.

Despite differences in our daily lives, our values are far more common than divergent. We believe that, if we face our challenges head-on, it should be possible to preserve the Vermont we love while at the same time adapt meaningfully to a changing global landscape.

One thing the Council concluded was that the state should "Act in Leadership" by embracing our ability to be a leader in a number of areas, including the environment, social issues, and civil rights. The state must act intentionally to develop itself into a laboratory for innovation, showing the rest of the nation, and the world, how to meet our challenges creatively and communally.

In the past few months, Vermont has faced a series of challenges, including a significant budget deficit and the debate over extending marriage to gay and lesbian Vermonters. So it's a good time to ask whether we're acting in leadership. And I'm not just talking about our elected officials or public figures, but whether each of us, in our own way, through our own contributions, is acting in a way that we - and our children - can be proud of.

There are some things we might consider. For example, has there been a strong vision and direction from our pace-setting leaders? Have we had meaningful citizen engagement in important decisions? Have we acted with a sense of both optimism and responsible risk-taking? Have we been open and tolerant in the spirit of our state motto, *Freedom and Unity*? Have we inspired other communities to emulate what we have done?

If the answers are yes, then we have much to build upon going forward. If the answers are no, then we have a lot of work to do. And I suspect, for many of us, the answers are mixed.

But each of us can take this opportunity to ask not just what we are doing right but how we can do it better. Our future depends on it.

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