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My Turn: Vermont fails badly at transparency

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Campaign for Vermont was formed with the goal of creating a robust debate about Vermont's future. We believe that state policymakers must pursue a vibrant and diversified economy above all else; one that creates more [jobs](#) than there are people and provides shared prosperity for all.

We believe also that non-partisan and informed debate results in middle-of-the-road, common sense public policy. We aggressively promote transparency because without it, we are left with uninformed arguments and angry partisanship and a government lacking accountability to you — its citizens.

As citizens, we have the right to know how we are taxed, how our money is spent, where it is spent and how well it's spent. Yet, in two recent national [studies](#) on governmental transparency and accountability, the best Vermont could do was a D-plus. Transparency and accountability is the clear path that allows Vermonters to judge how well our government is doing. Is health care reform important? Of course it is. Yet politicians in Montpelier are "rocketing" us toward a new system without showing us its cost.

The Legislature is pushing alternative energy legislation that increases the state's renewable energy portfolio. Does this make sense? Maybe, but at what cost? Vermonters want a low-carbon energy portfolio. But, again, Montpelier politicians haven't told us how much our electric bills will rise. As an example of the dramatic cost increase; we recently learned how this legislation will impact IBM — Chittenden County's largest private [employer](#). IBM's cost projection, prepared by Green Mountain Power, shows the company's electric bill rising by \$5-7million per year. That's a 16-20 percent increase. But most other businesses and citizens have no idea how this legislation will impact them. And our property tax bills, well that's also another sorry story.

Last week, USPIRG and the Center for Public Policy Integrity offered their assessment of Vermont's governmental transparency. USPIRG ranked Vermont at D-minus and the CPPI ranked us at D-plus. Here are just some of the highlights from the transparency ranking reports.

- USPIRG gave Vermont a D-minus in "Online Access to Government Spending [Data](#)"
- CPPI gave Vermont F's for Legislative Accountability, Ethics Enforcement, and Judicial Accountability
- CPPI gave Vermont D-minus for Executive Accountability and D-plus for Public Access to Information, State Insurance Commissions and State Civil Service [Management](#)

These failures in transparency and accountability must be addressed. Vermonters can't hold their government accountable without it. With proposals before us that dramatically restructure our healthcare system, cost shift subsidies for alternative energy onto rate payers, increase our property [taxes](#) even though the number of students in our schools is declining and a state budget growing at twice the rate of inflation, Vermonters must be prepared to act.

Campaign for Vermont believes Vermonters should demand transparency and accountability. Only if you do will you get it. Demand it soon, or pay the price. Without it, Vermonters will watch their prosperity suffocated by higher taxes, higher healthcare bills and higher energy costs.

Bruce Lisman of Shelburne is a founder of Campaign for Vermont.