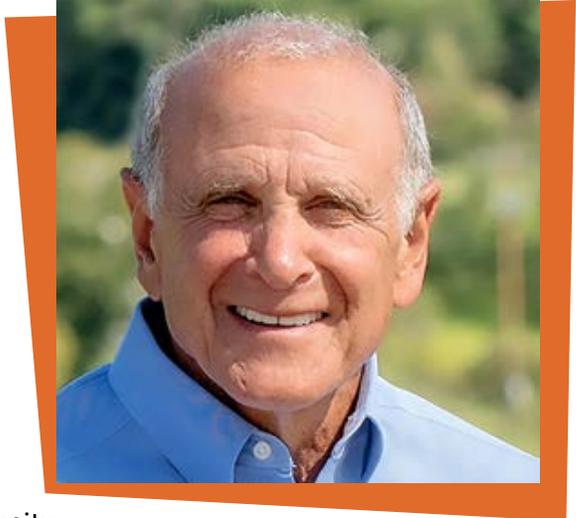


Bruce Lisman, Republican

Interview: July 26, 2016



1. Addressing Statewide Issues

Like many other states, Vermont faces many economic and social issues. We also know that 85% of Vermonters agree that arts and culture are vital to their community's life.

- Can you provide examples on how you would integrate the arts, culture, and creative community in solving social problems (or in enhancing opportunities for greater social or civic engagement)?
- How would you use the creative sector to drive economic development across the state?

Bruce Lisman: Let me tell you my intersection with the arts, if that's okay. First, one of my daughters worked at the Shelburne Museum in education. Her job was to bring in kids to see stuff with the hope that adults, their parents, would come behind. My older daughter plays the violin, as does her son. Although they don't live as close as they did just a couple years ago, they come through regularly doing work at the Boys and Girls Club. Recently they helped me campaign in assisted facilities, senior living places. I've done concerts like that around the state. I love art. Before ever imagining campaigning, I met lots of artists in your constituency, whether they paint or draw, or take photographs. I happen to like visual stuff, but it goes broader than that.

I was on the board of the Shelburne Museum for a dozen years. I was an avid supporter of the Fleming Museum. These things cycle and cycle. I've helped promote artists, some of whom you may have heard of, at earlier stages of their career, introducing them to people. I just sent two house guests on their way south to visit artists in their studios on their way out of state. I've got a big interest in arts generally.

So, if you ask a site manager where you want to put a plant, he or she will talk about transportation, energy, and those kind of amenities. If you ask a CEO where she wants to put a plant, some place in the top seven things she will mention is education, which the site manager wouldn't have mentioned. She will also mention the arts, and how we live, and how we see things around us. The difference is the CEO has a bigger, broader perspective.

I think the arts in our economy is going to be really important. I have in mind selling the state to the world, not just as a place to visit and see bucolic Vermont, or a place simply to pass through on the way to Canada or something, but rather as a place to live, a place to start a business, and

a place to work for others. I think the arts and education, and their intersection, are really essential.

I can give you some examples. Music, arts should be a part of our regular education, K to 12. It should be deeply embedded, it should be ordinary, it shouldn't be a point of contention about budgets. Sometimes it is. I think there are plenty of examples, whether it's in North Bennington where I visited, seven or eight years ago, a program that works with troubled adults, to really show their feelings in the form of artwork. My daughter did a concert at the Boys and Girls Club a few years ago, imagining what music looks like. You'd do a drawing and she would interpret it musically, taking from your drawing how it was meant to be in music. Then she cut CDs of the music so the kids would go home with their drawing and the music. She said of the fifty kids attending, she didn't think more than three or four of the kids had ever seen a violin before, or even knew what it sounded like.

I think those are good examples of the essential ingredient of things like art. I'd like to though, return to its role in the economy. Many of the artists in your constituency are sole proprietors, and they may be passionate about their art, but ultimately they're business people. They're sole proprietorships. The best of them are great artists who also find ways to either capture an audience or sell their art to somebody, but there are artists in our community who are good at what they do, but aren't able to actually get out of the house with their stuff. I'm not kidding. I was introduced to a woman who is a wonderful dancer, and she performs in a local, very local, community with children, and I said to her, "This is great," but it's me and two other people over there. I'm pretty sure we're related. I said, "You need to find a way to show this." She said, "Yeah. That's a good idea."

I think we need to help them become more commercial without changing the nature of who they are. Certainly it's easy to talk about those who paint or draw or take photographs. It's a competitive world. To be seen outside of the state or outside of their immediate community is a real challenge. I think they fit into the economy, 96% of them. All businesses in our state are small businesses. A fellow I saw, who does some great sculpture work, is a small businessman.

I read Richard Florida's work, which I loved, and there are examples where the arts and the rest of the real economy are running side by side and intertwined, and that provides not only a place, oftentimes a place to go or a place to be seen, but it gives us a sense there's a bigger world than what we just notice in our little store here, a little store there, and then there's an opportunity to intersect with someone who is providing real pleasure.

2. Personal Connection

We've all had defining moments in our lives, where a cultural experience (a performance you have attended, or a work of art you have seen in person, etc.) has made a lasting impact on your personal or professional life.

- What personal experience with arts, culture, or creativity has had an impact on your life and your view of Vermont? How has that impact changed you?

Bruce Lisman: As a child, another fellow and I were often deposited at the Fleming Museum for some program, and it was really babysitting. I don't think we always behaved as we should've at that age. But we did extraordinary things. At least I got a keen appreciation and met an occasional artist. Anyway, I can't paint or draw, to be clear. Seeing it was really quite interesting and it captured my interest. Some people go to flea markets. I haven't actually done that very often, but I like going to studios. I like going to museums. When my daughters were young, we had mandatory trips. I took them to things they wouldn't see on their own, and even if we only saw it once. Have you ever been to a museum and said, "I'll never go back there"? Then also I would take them there, they need to see it, and see artists at work or see it in different contexts...

I took one of my daughters to an extraordinary exhibition of a woman in lower Manhattan who had built a replica of New York City – The lower half of New York City – with bottles. You could only see it for one week, and then it was going to be destroyed in a grand celebration. I said, "This is fantastic," so we went there. We got there before it was destroyed. There it was, you could see all those buildings. How she did it, I'm not sure I remember exactly, with some drawings around it. Then later it was destroyed. My daughter and I talked about it for quite a long time.

I think art should be part of people's lives. It is not as important to others as it might be to me or to you, certainly, but sometimes we don't realize what we're seeing is art, and it's just interesting.

3. Arts Education and Programs for our Youth

Art instruction increases achievement across all academic disciplines and develops the whole child. We also know that 94% of Vermonters agree that the arts should be integrated into K-12 public school education.

- What will you do as Governor to champion arts education with our youth both in our schools and in our communities?
- How will you balance the importance of arts education with the push for primarily technical education (STEM)?

Bruce Lisman: I don't think it's one or the other, but I can appreciate that in an economy that has a largely flat population with rising budgets, and real pressure on meeting the needs of our communities, there frankly isn't enough money for anything. We lead the league in unfunded mandates and here's a good idea: "Here's a small amount of money. Good luck to you."

We have big mandates in front of us, and a governor and legislature that have spent their brains out leaving us with not enough to invest in important things. Education's under a lot of pressure because it's directly related to people's property taxes. The whole issue of what we can afford to be. Can we afford to live in our own homes? Can we afford to stay in our own

community? What's happened to my neighbors? Looks dark there; they went to Florida and didn't return.

Oftentimes, the arts are the butt-end of the debate about where we spend our money. I think I can be a spokesman on behalf of the value of an arts – I wouldn't call it an economy, but – the value of an arts culture in a state like ours. That is not the only thing we're going to sell to the outer world and to our own citizens, but it's one of those essential ingredients. Will it win the battle over learning science? I don't think it's a battle at all. I think it's a non-mutually exclusive parallel in which we should be talking about the arts for those ... Everybody should experience it and those kids who are interested should have the channel. For those of us who find STEM to be the best way and the most attractive way to progress through school and through the world, they should have it. They're not exclusive.

I think I can't guarantee to you anything except that what we need is a budget process that's more rational. That accurately reflects not only our resources, but our leads, which we have, for six years, really avoided. I fear that in the next couple years after this governor's gone, we'll discover that things are worse than we knew. I don't know what it means – the process of budgeting – but I have an idea of spending at a rate of about 2% a year for the next three years so we can rebuild our capacity to invest. What happens at a local level's is hard to say, but I'll be an avid and active spokesman on behalf of the arts and culture.

4. The New Administration's Role in the Creative Community

The State allocates funding each year for the Vermont Arts Council, the Vermont Humanities Council, and others that serve Vermont's creative community. Some are concerned that the state's capacity to support the programs and activities that are vital to the community are insufficient.

- If you share this concern, please share your ideas on how you might address them. For example, what three revenue sources will you create or use to increase the state's financial investment in the creative community? What specific program priorities related to the creative community are you particularly interested in investing in?
- If you don't share this concern, please let us know what you believe is the path forward for the creative community. What specifically should the state be investing in to ensure the vitality of Vermont's creative sector?

Bruce Lisman: You should elect me governor because I'm the one person speaking about needing a vibrant economy. I don't talk about a silver bullet of having 700,000 people. That'd be another 80,000 people arriving on our doorstep. I don't talk about one tax or one tax relief program. There's a comprehensive need to restore an economy that actually grows, that creates real jobs, and throws real tax revenues into our government so we can afford to spend in the right places. I can tell you that the arts are important to me. In a couple of ways, I've already told you that. I've given you examples that would say "this guy really cares." Trying to help the arts community is in the same category as trying to help other constituent groups, and there's a wicked fight every year. They've raised the budget by 5% a year, even though the

economy's growing at no better than 2%. That's a \$709 increase in taxes, fees, and surcharges. The state citizens are exhausted and they have nothing to show for it.

I'll be as protective as I can of your needs, and would expect to speak to you often about what I think is the broader culture in arts economy. But we need to develop a strategic budget. We need to choose three or four of the most important, big things and find the ways to cover secondary, even tertiary, needs as well. I can promise you that I'll be a governor that is mindful of the broader needs, but will try to bring to you a government that's more responsive, with talented people in areas that are crucial; of technology that works and the capacity to get things done, something that has been lost for six or seven years. I have a great interest in it, more, probably, than the other candidates, but the best thing I can do for you is to have a government that works for you. An ethics package. A strategic budget so you know where your place is. To have some predictability of the funding. A guy who would stand up and say, "Let's go to the museum and see what's going on there."

5. A Cultural Destination

While Vermont is characterized as a special place, many believe the state has yet to effectively leverage the strength of our arts, culture, and creative community as a means for branding and attracting residents, employees, and visitors.

- How would you utilize our state's cultural assets to make Vermont a place where people want to live, work, play, and visit?

Bruce Lisman: I saw the question, and I've been giving it considerable thought in different contexts. I have in mind a ... Listen, let me be clear. We're running a lot of advertisements on my behalf, and I now know I know nothing but advertising. I thought I did. Now I know I don't. I nod my head vigorously now. That's what I do. Nor am I a marketing person, though I think we all think we are. I think we need to market our state to the 30 or 40 million people that surround us in the northeast, north too. Also to areas of the country that think of Vermont as a place they want to visit, but haven't gotten to it yet, or it's on their top ten list, but it keeps slipping.

A long time ago, when I was a young man sitting in an office in Odessa, Texas, in the middle of the Permian Basin, I read Texas Monthly, or Texas Highways – I forget the name of it, forgive me--and there it was: "Ten places you want to visit before you die." It included Paris and Rome. Israel was on there. There was Vermont, number seven. I remember it was number seven. What the others, were, I don't know. You say, "What? How could that be?" There's some idealized version, and mind you, this was a long time ago.

Maybe we should market ourselves in a way that's more broadly effective. Think about this. We are a bucolic state, and we do want to advertise that. I think we want a goal — just as an example, although I haven't done the work yet – we have an occupancy rate in our hotels, motels, and inns of probably no more than 30%; 60% plus in Chittenden County. If you just said we want to achieve 50% occupancy, we're talking about a lot of people pouring through the

state. Different people have different interests. Not everyone wants to see a leaf. Not everyone wants to taste maple syrup or try one of our specialty foods. Some are going to be here just for the arts. We need to promote it.

The process of promoting it ... I'll give you the example of something I liked and ran across in Iowa, where I once had to go for some business. They were running these small ads for ... It was for Iowans and it was about the museum trail. They were promoting to their fellow citizen the idea of visiting eight or nine museums, and they offered up a trail to make it more romantic and more interesting. They included covered bridges, apparently! It must've been tied to a movie or a book...

I think we can do the same, and promote not just museums, but an arts culture. But we need to make it easier for people to see and feel and touch. I imagine a marketing program that is really designed to not bring people here, but for those who'd like to go to school here, or work for somebody else here, or come here to start their business. There's a lifestyle that's very compelling, and we need to make it compelling enough that they're going to try us out.

I believe this is our moment. We have a very special place. We need to do some work. We need a budget that works. We need to work on some environmental things too, like the lake. I think the arts are an effective draw.

I'm completely biased. I like museums and I like art and I visit studios. Really, you can go to the Northeast Kingdom and go to communities by themselves that are quite interesting and historic in some ways, and along the way, you can find an artist or a sculptor or a potter. You can even find a circus. During the summertime, it's packed with kids and their parents. I went to a camp and did sports, and here are people doing some kind of wild thing with rings. What? It's fantastic! I think we have more to offer than we get credit for. Packaging that in a way that resonates with people, not just in our state, but in those around us, is really the catch.

6. Priorities

The start of a Governor's term often sets the administration's tone and priorities.

- When elected, what actions will you take in your first 100 days to provide support and resources to the creative community?

Bruce Lisman: The first hundred days are going to be spent doing a whole bunch of things. We need a budget, and I think we're going to discover that's going to be harder than we imagined, pulling one together by January. We need talent flooding into our state's government, to run agencies and departments. People who care about not only the subject matter, but people that are ambitious on behalf of our state. We need an ethics package so you now know they work for you, not the other way around. We need to focus on four or five mega-priorities, but also some of the other things that we ultimately need to agree that that's going to have to fly for a strategic plan. Not a hundred pages. One page with a list of things that we need to do so that

we actually have a budget that makes sense. Eventually, that clears the way for what I would call investments and other things, including the arts.

But what I can promise you in that first hundred days is not the delivery of a check. I couldn't and shouldn't say that, but rather I'll keep you in mind. As someone who's demonstrated in thirty minutes that I care a lot about it... I'm naturally curious about the world, and think that there's an opportunity for the arts to play a central role in our future. I can promise you that you can call me and we'll go see something. I can promise you I want to do that. Maybe that's the best thing I should do for a hundred days.