

Progressives find fault with session

By Nancy Remsen

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MONTPELIER — Burlington's three Progressive legislators and their Brattleboro colleague stepped to a microphone outside the Statehouse on Tuesday to counter the rosy view of the recent legislative session that other politicians have painted.



The four House members said working-class and low-income Vermonters will be hurt more than helped by many of the recent legis-

lative actions.

Many people will pay more for health care coverage, said Rep. Robert Kiss, P-Burlington. He was especially discouraged, he said, that even when lawmakers learned the state would receive an unanticipated \$84 million from the federal government over the next two years, "we still refused to look at what we

had done to people's benefits."

Rep. Sarah Edwards, P-Brattleboro, criticized the Legislature's decision to walk away from a plan that would have shifted more of the burden of paying for schools to the income tax. Instead, lawmakers passed an education reform measure that substitutes a higher sales tax for a portion of the

property taxes that pay for education.

"I don't think this was a solution of any long term," Edwards said.

Rep. Steve Hingtgen, P-Burlington, said increasing the sales tax from 5 percent to 6 percent will have a dramatic impact on Vermonters with the lowest incomes.

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The Progressives also said they were concerned about actions the Legislature failed to take. Rep. David Zuckerman of Burlington, caucus leader, noted, for example, that lawmakers voted to increase the minimum wage, but rejected indexing the wage so it could rise automatically as the cost of living increases.

Zuckerman also mentioned that the House and Senate failed to consider election reforms such as instant run-off voting. That's a procedure that would allow voters to rank their preferences for candidates so the candidate that most people preferred could be chosen in the event

no one received a majority of first-choice votes.

Numbering just four in the 150-seat House and lacking any seats in the Senate, Progressives say they recognize they have limited power to influence the legislative agenda.

Still, Zuckerman said, "I don't think it is a stretch to say a third of Vermonters care about these same issues."

The quartet promised to focus on health care, housing and worker protection measures when they return to the Statehouse in January.

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