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National Leader in Political Depolarization to Address Largest Gathering of Vermont Municipal Officials



The cofounder of a national initiative aimed at reducing political polarization across the country will address the largest annual gathering in Vermont next month. UNITE Chief External Affairs Officer Tami Pyfer will share how a tool she created, The Dignity Index, can help leaders navigate political and cultural divides during her remarks at the Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT) Town Fair on October 8.

The Dignity Index is an eight-point scale used to measure how people talk to each other when they disagree. Pyfer and her colleagues Tom Rosshirt and Tim Shriver, the founder and CEO of UNITE and Chairman of Special Olympics International, created the Index to help reduce contempt in political speech.

"Disagreement and diversity of thought is what fuels a healthy democracy," said Pyfer, a former city council member and state official from Utah. "The challenge is what we do when we disagree. Treating the other side with contempt tears us apart but treating them with dignity brings us together and helps us solve even our most complex problems."

VLCT Executive Director Ted Brady said municipal leaders across the country have been using the Index to help them elevate political discussions in Utah, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania.

"Vermonters are increasingly feeling the national pressure of incivility, disrespect, and contempt during selectboard meetings, town meetings, and on social media," Brady said. "Attendees at Town Fair will leave with a pragmatic, easy-to-use tool that will help them restore civility to town hall."

Pyfer will deliver a keynote address at 9 AM on Wednesday, October 8 at the Doubletree Hotel and Conference Center in South Burlington. Registration is \$119 and includes breakfast, lunch, snacks, and more than a dozen breakout sessions for various municipal officials. Registration is open through Wednesday, October 1 at vlct.org/TownFair.

Members of the media interested in attending should contact Allie Buckley, abuckley@vlct.org.