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## Middlebury Dem. Ruth Hardy announces state Senate bid

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By [John Flowers](#)

EAST MIDDLEBURY — After having spent several years serving her community on local school boards, East Middlebury Democrat Ruth Hardy hopes to graduate this fall to a state Senate seat representing Addison County, Huntington and Buel's Gore.

Hardy, the executive director of Emerge Vermont, confirmed her candidacy for one of the county's two Senate seats on the same day as [Sen. Claire Ayer announced on May 3 that she wouldn't seek a ninth consecutive two-year term.](#)

It will be the first statewide run for Hardy, 48, but she's no political neophyte. In addition to having run successfully for the Mary Hogan Elementary and Addison Central School District boards, Hardy has spent the past few years advising women campaigning for spots in state government. Such is the mission of Emerge Vermont — to get more women involved in decision-making in the Green Mountain State.

When Hardy decided to take a pass on re-election to the Addison Central School District board early this year, she had no idea she'd be jumping into a different, much larger campaign challenge.

"I didn't know I was going to run in 2018 until the middle of April," Hardy said during a Tuesday interview. "It was something I wanted to do in the future, but I was thinking it would be more like 2020. But when Sen. Ayer announced she wasn't going to run again, I had to jump at the chance. There's not an open seat (in the state Senate) very frequently."

Hardy decided to practice what she's been preaching: Part of the Emerge Vermont mantra for aspiring candidates is, "When there's an opportunity, you have to take it."

She'll be one of at least 26 Emerge Vermont alums running for office this year, according to Hardy, who is proud to be among them.

"2018, I hope, will be a huge year for women in politics," she said.

### FAMILY LEAVE

Hardy took time on Tuesday to outline her campaign priorities, which are centered on the notion of improving quality of life for Vermont families — particularly those facing economic challenges.

For example, she believes the state should pass a law mandating paid family leave for new parents and long-term caregivers.

She and her husband, Jason Mittell, have three children, Greta (17), Anya (14) and Walter (12). She recalled



### Addy Indy News Digest

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"Paid family leave is something I never had as a mom," said Hardy. "It really impacted my ability to have a job and help support my family."

She noted she's fortunate to have a spouse earning a wage that could sustain the household while she was caring for their children. But Hardy knows many other Vermont families are not that lucky. And caregiving, she stressed, covers the gamut from babies to elder relatives.

"I think it's incredibly important we have paid family leave — and not only for women," she said.

The state Senate on Tuesday gave preliminary approval to a bill that would guarantee employees 12 weeks of paid family leave. The House has already passed a complementary bill. Gov. Phil Scott has put the initiative on his veto list, however, citing the income tax required to fund the proposal.

"If (the family leave bill) doesn't pass this year, that would be something I would want to work on next year," she said.

#### OTHER ISSUES

Also high on Hardy's legislative to-do list is pushing for "high-quality, affordable infant, child and elder care."

"Like family leave, child care has a huge effect on families and generally mothers and our ability to contribute financially and have a good job," Hardy said. "That was also a real struggle for me, when we had young children — I literally would do the math of whether it even made sense for me to work, given how much I could make as a mother versus how much I was paying out for child care. It was depressing when I looked at that margin."

Hardy wants the state to approve universal child care, beginning with infants.

"Infant care is a huge need in our state and our world," Hardy said.

Another issue affecting families — and indeed ripping some of them apart — is drug addiction, according to Hardy. She specifically cited opioids and the extent to which people are abusing prescription painkillers.

Key in battling that scourge, according to Hardy, is "the ability to have services in our community that don't have a huge waiting list."

Hardy wants the state to develop more programming to help people wean themselves off of opioids. She also believes more services are needed for mental health patients. She praised the Counseling Service of Addison County for its efforts in local communities and schools, and called the organization a "role model" for other mental health agencies to emulate.

"We need to figure out how to broaden and strengthen mental health services in our towns, so people don't have to feel they need to go away to get the services they need, and make it affordable and accessible," Hardy said.

Every family needs food, and Hardy believes the state should do more to help the farmers and consumers.

"I want to make sure the families throughout our state have access to good food, nutritious food, food that's going to help them grow and help them be able to learn and feel OK about the world and themselves," Hardy said, echoing her family's motto "Good food helps."

Hardy noted children from low-income households are increasingly depending on schools for their nutritional needs. Some schools provide breakfast and lunch and send kids home with dinners. She's concerned about how those children are fed during the summer months, and is thus a big fan of the federal Summer Food Service Program that's providing meals to communities that meet assistance guidelines — including Middlebury.

"But it's pretty limited in what it's able to do," she said of the meals. "I'd like to see that expanded."

She called community food shelves a great service, but added they're intended more as a stop-gap measure for families with empty larders. Hardy said she wants to see some systematic changes that would give families the training and resources they need to feed themselves on a long-term basis.

#### FUNDING QUESTIONS

Hardy acknowledged many of her ideas will need resources, and state and federal funds are in short supply. That said, she wants to be part of the decision-making when it comes to allocating funds in Montpelier. She said she's passionate about math and budgeting, skills she relied upon as the former assistant budget director for Middlebury College and in her leadership of the ACSD's finance committee.

"I'm anxious to dig in and see the state budget spreadsheets," Hardy said. "I would love to have that hands-on approach to budgeting at the state level, so that I can see where we actually invest our money and in which programs."

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"If you want to create change and want to ensure effective programs, you have to target your investments into the things that are going to have the biggest impact," she said. She believes paid family leave is an example of a good financial investment, in part because it would support workers, give employers a more stable workforce and thus help the economy.

Like many others, Hardy is concerned about climate change and believes the state could be taking more steps in what is a worldwide problem.

"I have a lot to learn in this area, but I would really welcome the opportunity to work with colleagues ... to find things in the energy and environmental protection areas that would have an impact," Hardy said.

A complete list of Hardy's campaign priorities can be found on her website, [ruthforvermont.com](http://ruthforvermont.com). Her campaign launch party is slated for Tuesday, May 22, at 5 p.m., at American Flatbread in Middlebury.

Hardy enters a field that thus far includes one other confirmed candidate: Incumbent Sen. Chris Bray, D-New Haven. But those two could soon have some company. Former Rep. Paul Ralston, D-Middlebury, told the *Independent* on Wednesday he's seriously considering a Senate bid. His entry into the race would guarantee a Democratic primary prior to the general election.

While he has yet to confirm his status, past candidate Addison Republican Peter Briggs still maintains a "Briggs for Vt. Senate" Facebook page. Efforts to reach Briggs before deadline were unsuccessful.

If elected, Hardy promised to take on tough issues and be accountable to her constituents. She promised to keep constituents informed about goings on in Montpelier and to "tell them the truth about what we're doing and what I believe, what I think and how I vote."

She also vowed to reach across the aisle in researching issues.

"There are always multiple perspectives, and that is something I would commit to doing, is really reaching out to people in the district to hear their stories and perspectives," she said. "I don't feel like my perspective is the only perspective. When you're talking about really tough issues — like climate change and rural economic development and education policy, there are always going to be different opinions."

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