

**THOUGHTS  
AND  
TALKING POINTS  
ON  
PRESENTING  
THE DECLARATION OF INCLUSION  
TO YOUR  
TOWN**

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QUOTATION BY ERNIE ROYAL

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***“When you move to Vermont, bring with you what you did that made you a success, and adapt it to the Vermont way.”***

*Ernie Royal*  
*Owner, Royal’s Hearthsides Restaurant*  
*Rutland, Vermont*  
*1964 to 1993*

*Who’s Who in Black America*  
*Board Member, National Restaurant Association*  
*Board Member, Culinary Institute of America*  
*Member, U S. Culinary Olympic Team*

## BACKGROUND ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DECLARATION IN INCLUSION

Distressed by recent catastrophic events unfolding across the United States relating to human rights, justice and equality, Bob Harnish, a long-time resident of Pittsford, decided to do something.

His concern led to a phone call to Al Wakefield, a former businessman in the Rutland area, who shared a similar distress and felt a need to do something involving “hands on”.

The intent was to set in motion an overarching statement that would build on Vermont’s agreed upon uniqueness, its long-standing reputation for being a leader in addressing injustices and ensuring that events occurring in Wisconsin, Minnesota, New York, and other states do not happen here. The Declaration of Inclusion, first adopted by the Town of Franklin, was the result.

The intent of the Declaration of Inclusion (DOI) is to indicate and reinforce the message to all visitors, residents and those thinking about or planning to come and stay, that Vermont is a welcoming community, that it invites all to bring their families and friends as well as their talents and skills, that Vermont is a community of people who will treat them fairly, provide encouragement and support for their interests and bring the full resources of the State, cities and towns to ensure their well-being and security.

More specifically, the goals of the DOI are to:

- Highlight the fact that we as Vermonters are not fully aware of the systemic racism that is present in our majority “white” society
- Raise consciousness about the importance of diversity, the positive effect that diversity can have on our economy and, also, on equity and justice
- Emphasize the importance of preparing our youth to live and prosper in the more diverse society in which we all will soon be living
- Tell the world at large that Vermont welcomes all people to our state, a state which is struggling to maintain its population and therefore its ability to fund basic programs for its citizens
- Attract people with myriad skills and traditions to Vermont to live, work and raise

families in a state that values and encourages diversity in its population

- Focus attention on examining employee manuals, police protocols and hiring practices, to promote fairness and equity in applying legislation, ordinances, etc., within our towns and the state as a whole
- Employ best practices in coaching municipal and state employees, including police, to value and respect all citizens.

To date, the Towns of Franklin, Pittsford, Waterbury, Moretown and Brandon have approved and adopted the DOI included in this packet.

#### EVIDENCE OF COMMITMENT - Evidence of commitment to the spirit of the DOI

At the town level: inclusion in the Town's website, employee manuals, police protocols, newsletters, economic development marketing materials, etc.

At the State level: inclusion in major addresses by leading state officials, printed materials used to welcome visitors, policy, and operating procedures, external communications, public relations pieces, etc.

At the organizational level: inclusion in policies, operating procedures and similar documents used by labor unions, law enforcement agencies and academic institutions throughout the state.

For questions or discussion: Al Wakefield, [al@wakefield-global.com](mailto:al@wakefield-global.com) 802 770 3958  
Bob Harnish, [rharnish24@gmail.com](mailto:rharnish24@gmail.com) 802 779 7714

**Town of \_\_\_\_\_ Declaration of Inclusion**

The Town of \_\_\_\_\_ condemns racism and discrimination of any type and welcomes all persons, regardless of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, or disability, and will protect these classes to the fullest extent of the law.

As a town, we formally condemn discrimination in all its forms and commit to fair and equal treatment of everyone in our community.

The Town of \_\_\_\_\_ has and will continue to be a place where individuals can live freely and express their opinions.

By the \_\_\_\_\_ Select Board on \_\_\_\_\_ 2021

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## PRESENTING THE DOI TO YOUR TOWN OR GROUP

Thank you for helping to make Vermont a more inclusive and diverse State. We know that each town or organization is different and that the strategy for gaining adoption and implementation of the DOI may be different.

Following are some ideas to consider as you prepare to present the DOI. We have purposely tried to focus our thoughts on the positive aspects of diversity as being more likely to win favor, acknowledgement, and endorsement.

1. Depending on the Select Board or group you are presenting to, you may want to present it and speak to it at one meeting and then return to it at the next meeting and hope for a motion to adopt.

2. Prior to your second meeting you may be wise to approach a friendly member to support the Declaration of Inclusion, speak to it and make the motion to adopt. We recommend that you be present at both meetings to give further reasons for support and to answer any questions.

3. Some members of the organization may wish to change the wording and that should be fine provided that the basic thoughts are preserved, the designated groups are considered, and they continue to be included. It is designed to be open to suggestions.

4. Ultimately the goal is to have state-wide adoption including at the State level with the Governor actively endorsing it and making it one of the guiding principles in all departments of state government.

5. Speaking with those who may be reluctant, do not see a need for such a statement or even oppose the DOI may be useful as well. Doing so provides the opportunity to discuss and hopefully resolve such statements as:

“We don’t have those problems here”

“I am not a racist. Why do we need such a statement in our town?”

“We like our town as it is. Vermont is fine without bringing this stuff up.”

“If it’s not an issue, why are we talking about this?”

6. There may be doubt about ways to implement, monitor, and assess progress on the implementation of the DOI. Turning words into action is not the easiest. Since each community is different, with different needs and at different stages of social and economic development we suggest follow-up discussions led by a skilled discussion leader. He/she may

be a respected member of the community who has embraced the concept and is willing to take-on this challenge. You may also wish to consider a professional facilitator who has the relevant experience and has lived and worked in Vermont. There are very competent consultants here and we would be pleased to assist you in identifying those potentially interested in working with you.

Thank you for your interest in moving the Declaration of Inclusion forward. The time is right. Justice, Equity, and Inclusion are much in the news and the concept of true and meaningful equality is long overdue. Our Founding Fathers would be pleased with our actions.

For questions or discussion: Al Wakefield [al@wakefield-global.com](mailto:al@wakefield-global.com)  
Bob Harnish [rharnish24@gmail.com](mailto:rharnish24@gmail.com)

## RATIONALE FOR ADOPTION OF A DECLARATION OF INCLUSION (DOI)

[As you are preparing yourself to present the DOI to your town or group you might consider some of the reasons / suggestions below and putting these thoughts into your own words.]

I believe that this Town has always treated people respectfully and fairly so we should say it with a forceful statement. By stating it, it then becomes a message that we welcome all people, and we thrive when we have a diverse population. Think of the Irish, Italians and Poles who came here to work in the marble and granite industries and the important heritage they brought with them. Vermont would not be the culturally rich state it is without these immigrants and many more. These people all brought skills, ambitions, religious tradition, interesting food, unique customs and so much more.

The United States as a whole, is the most diverse country on earth and the most successful by almost any measure. And it is no coincidence that Burlington and Chittenden county have the most dynamic economy in Vermont as well as the most diverse population. Diversity brings creativity which leads to solutions and a richer life for all.

We all want our cities and towns (and our state) to grow in a healthy way, to increase our tax base, as well as fund our schools and roads. To make this happen we need to welcome all people. We need to reach out, proactively, to the world at large, with the message that **WE WELCOME ANYONE** who wants to live and work and add richness to our state. Currently, the population in Vermont is static or declining with the low fertility rate and young people leaving the state for careers elsewhere. In addition, the remaining population is aging and putting a strain on underfunded state resources.

Historically Vermont has been and still is one of the least diverse states, but our children will be living in a more diverse community of people in this country. Let's prepare our children for living in this more diverse world by encouraging and promoting diversity in our Town and schools. Let's prepare our children to be comfortable with people of all backgrounds and beliefs so they can survive and thrive in the wider world.

With working from home becoming well accepted, people are moving to Vermont bringing jobs, new skills, and capabilities. They embody the way our world will look in 10 to 20 years and their presence may inspire other talented folks to move to our town and state. These new residents will be remodeling homes and building new ones, their tax dollars paying for better funded services. With a more vibrant and interesting economy more of our young people will want to stay, work, and raise their families in Vermont.

A Declaration of Inclusion is another tool in the “toolbox” of those responsible for the Town’s economic development, that is, their toolbox of reasons why someone should locate a business here, perhaps choosing our town (or state) over another.

A Declaration such as this would mark our town and its leaders as a forward-thinking community of people, stepping out in front for what we know is right and deeply rooted in the values that America and Vermont say it champions.

We all have heard that America is a “melting pot” of people from all over the world; America has always welcomed diverse people, and embraced their cultures, languages, foods, customs, religions, and traditions. This is nothing new. Let’s continue the tradition. Let’s take this small but affirmative step toward the American ideal as stated in our precious Constitution.

*[Add your own thoughts to these reasons and end by urging adoption of the DOI or something similar and making it an integral part of the guiding principles of the town. Be prepared to provide copies of the Declaration to Select Board members, town managers, and others.]*

**FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND SUPPORT** - For additional information, background, and support for moving forward on a Declaration of Inclusion, we encourage you to contact:

Robert (Bob) Harnish, rharnish24@gmail.com	802 779 7714
J. Alvin (Al) Wakefield, al@wakefield-global.com	802 770 3958

## **J. ALVIN WAKEFIELD – BIO**

Al Wakefield has been a resident of Vermont for over 35 years, most of that in Mendon. As many others have done, Al and his family came to the community to ski, enjoy the great outdoors, and the more relaxed life that Vermont affords.

During their first visit here, the Wakefields dined at Royal's Hearthside Restaurant, met Ernie and Willa Royal, and subsequently acquired both the restaurant as well as the newly established Royal's Gourmet Food Market.

Al's visits with the Royals and, subsequently, with Preston Smith, Frank Punderson, and Otto Iannantuoni, all long-time residents and successful business owners, convinced the Wakefields that they would be accepted and could continue to build their dreams here.

After two years the Wakefields sold the enterprises and Al went on to build an international executive search firm, operating from Mendon and New York City.

## **ROBERT (BOB) HARNISH - BIO**

Bob Harnish, who lives in Pittsford, moved to Vermont in 1964 in response to the lure of skiing, after college and a three-year tour in the Air Force. He and his wife, Breda, purchased a small inn, Summit Lodge, which they later sold to buy the Cortina Inn.

The couple had no children of their own but over the years they “took under wing” a Puerto Rican boy, George Valentin, and two Hmong (Laotian) kids, Sheng and Maisian Vang. All three have moved on, after getting college degrees, to have families and impressive careers. These relationships have made clear [to Bob] the struggles faced by people of the BIPOC and AAPI communities in Vermont as well as other states.

Hospitality is in Bob’s DNA and this goes beyond innkeeping, to the whole of Vermont as a state that will benefit enormously in terms of diversity, culture, vibrancy, tax dollars and so much more by letting the “world” know that people of all backgrounds are welcome.