

## At home in Congress and on the Trail

By Bruce T. Paddock

U.S. Representative Elizabeth Esty (D-5) spent a busy afternoon in the Northwest Corner on Wednesday, May 10. She started at 1 p.m. at Geer Nursing and Rehabilitation Center in North Canaan, where she met with a private citizens group. She left for a fundraising event at 6:45 p.m., having met at Sharon Hospital with CEO Peter Cordeau and CFO Christian Bergeron to discuss both the hospital's purchase by Health Quest and the healthcare bill that recently passed in the House of Representatives.

Between the two meetings, Esty hiked a section of the Appalachian Trail in Falls Village. She was accompanied by Will Callaway and Dave Boone of the Appalachian Mountain Club, the

group responsible for maintaining the trail in New England; Adam Brown of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy; Tim Abbott of the Housatonic Valley Association; hiker and trail volunteer

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— U.S. Rep. Elizabeth Esty

Joel Jones; two staff members and two reporters. Abbott is also one of The Lakeville Journal's two Nature's Notebook columnists.

Esty seemed to be in her element on the trail, pointing out various species of plant and animal life and asking for infor-

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U.S. Rep. Elizabeth Esty (D-5), left, and Tim Abbott of the Housatonic Valley Association viewed natural features of the Appalachian Trail in Falls Village.

### ESTY

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mation on wheelchair accessibility ("What sort of grade do you have to maintain?"), regulations ("What are the rules on hazard trees? And will we need to change those rules?"), invasive species ("Are we having a problem with knotweed here? I'm seeing knotweed in so many places.") and a variety of other subjects.

The Falls Village section of the trail has a 1-mile loop that runs along the Housatonic River and is handicapped accessible.

Esty described her motivation for the hike as two-fold.

"Part of it is to see a little bit of the Trail, to talk to folks who are helping to maintain it. It's an opportunity to see the work that's being done, a chance for me to see what that really means."

Her second reason was "to draw some attention, frankly — to remind people that we have these treasures in our own backyard. We have an opportunity to enjoy them, but we also have a responsibility to try to maintain them for generations to come."

Esty emphasized the importance of maintaining natural sites such as the Appalachian Trail, especially in difficult economic times.

"We have to figure out how we can best combine our resources — volunteerism, taxpayer dollars, nonprofit support, community support — so that we don't lose the value that we have here."

She added that the trail benefits not just the communities that lie along it, but also the individuals in those communities, on a personal level.

"We say 'Awesome!' and 'Wonderful!' But being in a place like this truly is awe-inspiring and wonder-filled. We all need to make time and space in our lives for that."

"We're really fortunate in the Northwest Corner to have this. I know how much I benefit from it, and I hope other people take advantage of it, too — to restore themselves and to reconnect with what is good."