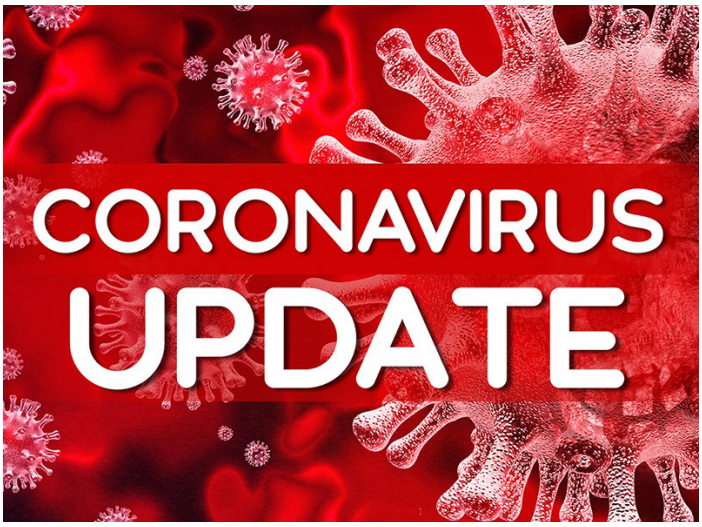
Week In Action Newsletter
March 13, 2020
Read the full newsletter with links and more content on VSEA.org



More This Week:

AFT President Interviewed On Coronavirus Threat To Members ... *page 3*

DCF Sends Memo, Detailing Protocols For Service Delivery During Coronavirus Crisis ... *page 3*

State Colleges' Unit At Impasse With Chancellor On New Agreement ... *page 3*

Revamped VSEA Website Goes Live Next Week! ... *page 4*

It's Time To Turn Up The Volume! Action Alert: Keep Woodside Open! ... *page 4*

***Reminder!* March 31 Is The Deadline To Submit VSEA Bylaw Changes** ... *page 4*

VSEA's Spring Membership Drive! Recruit Members, Win Prizes! ... *page 5*

Quote of the Week! ... *page 5*

Sampling Of What Other Governors Are Doing To Confront Coronoavirus Threat ... *page 5*

Connecticut Lawmakers Advance Bill To "Push Back" On *Janus* Ruling ... *page 6*

And More!

VSEA Meets With State To Discuss Coronavirus Threat. Lots Of Moving Pieces

VSEA leaders and staff met on Monday with Administration representatives to learn what all is known about the coronavirus threat here in Vermont, to both the public and to workers, as well as what kind of response(s) to the Administration is preparing to make. Representing VSEA were President Bellini (by phone), First VP Aimee Towne, Executive Director Steve Howard, Labor Relations Director Gary Hoadley and Field Services Director Gretchen Naylor.

Towne reported to the Council that the VSEA team was updated on the work of a special task force created to focus solely on the coronavirus threat and that the Administration representatives want the union to share what its hearing from frontline employees with them, so they can produce a FAQ that covers all the bases. Towne wrote that both parties agreed that any information being disseminated must be factual and VSEA and the State will be working together to ensure this is the case.

Also discussed:

- In anticipation of a wider outbreak, each department is reviewing and revising its Continuity of Operations Plan, (COOP Plans); and
- Talks are still underway to address the myriad of issues presented by this virus.

VDH Coronavirus Website Up & Running

On Wednesday, Secretary of the Administration Susanne Young sent the following memo to all state employees. In case you missed it, the memo reads:

Last week, the Secretary's Office advised all state employees about how to access the most current facts and guidance about the COVID-I9 (coronavirus) in

Continued on page 2

Continued from page 1:

Vermont. The Vermont Department of Health is updating the information daily on their website.

You are encouraged to check the site often for updated information and guidance on many frequently asked questions. The guidance includes helpful information on how to help keep respiratory illnesses like COVID-I9 from spreading, travel information and situation updates from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

As a reminder, there are every day common sense actions every one of us can take to help keep illness from spreading at work, at home, and in our communities:

- *Wash your hands often and well with soap and water. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer;*
- *Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands;*
- *Cover your cough or sneeze with your sleeve or a tissue. Throw tissues in the trash;*
- *Don't shake hands as a greeting - a simple head nod achieves the same goal;*
- *Avoid close contact with people who are sick;*
- *Stay home when you are sick; and*
- *Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.*

In addition to taking the above steps individually, I have directed the Department of Buildings and General Services (BGS) to institute heightened work, engineering, and space controls to help maintain healthy buildings and help reduce the spread of illnesses in state-owned and state-leased buildings. The protocols noted below were recently developed and are currently under implementation:

- *Heightened cleaning and disinfection efforts, such as frequently cleaning "high touch" surfaces, including common areas, client-service areas, doorknobs, railings, and restrooms;*
- *Using damp rather than dry dusting to avoid spreading dust particles;*
- *Moving restroom wastebaskets next to restrooms doors allowing employees and visitors to use towels to open doors;*
- *Instituting tailored Heating, Ventilation, and Air Condition (HVAC) protocols to circulate additional fresh air into our buildings and ensure HVAC systems and components such as filters are operating at optimal performance;*
- *Distributing hand sanitizer in common areas of buildings that house vulnerable populations such as correctional facilities and mental health care facilities and those office that deal directly with the public on a daily basis. Hand sanitizer (see above) is not a substitute for frequent hand washing, however, use when soap and water are available;*
- *Displaying posters promoting proper hand-washing techniques in restrooms.*
- *Again, we want to convey our gratitude to all our colleagues who have worked tirelessly to provide the most updated information and guidance available to our workforce and all Vermonters.*

Keep The Updates Coming!

Since *WIA* first requested members to email what you're receiving and hearing about your department or agency's response to the coronavirus, dozens of responses have been emailed, and the input has been (and will continue to be) very, very helpful. Keep them coming.

Members are asked to send an email to vsea@vsea.org and write "Corona Response" in the subject line,

Posters!

The Vermont Department of Health, in coordination with federal agencies, recently published a set of posters that VSEA is recommending members print out to hang on your VSEA worksite bulletin board. You can view and/or download the posters online at VSEA.org.

AFT President Interviewed On Coronavirus Threat To Members

VPR interviewed the president of AFT Vermont and the Vermont Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals, Deb Snell, this week to learn more about how frontline Vermont health care workers are preparing for coronavirus threat.

Here's an excerpt:

Q: You've been in regular contact with hospital officials, I understand. Are you confident that nurses and nurses assistants and others who are doing hands-on care at the hospitals, will have the equipment they need, things like masks and gowns, to protect themselves from potential exposure to coronavirus?

Deb Snell: Yes. In fact, I just left a meeting at the hospital where they assured us that they did have enough of the ... personal protective wear for all of the staff. So I think right now it's just a matter of being smart and washing your hands, staying home if you're sick, and nurses are well aware of that, as well as other workers in the hospital.

Q: In terms of contact with your members in the unions, are you hearing concerns about coronavirus? What are some of the things they're sharing with you?

Deb Snell: Oh, there's major concerns, especially about what happens if there is an outbreak at the hospital, because some of these community hospitals, if they have to start isolating staff, half their staff may be gone. We're not near that yet, and I think that's the concern, and those are the fears that we need to allay.

Upcoming Steward Training:

Colleges' Steward Training
Thursday, March 26, 2020
8:30 a.m. -3:00 p.m.
Montpelier - VSEA HQ
155 State Street

Please RSVP to VSEA Administrative Assistant Sue DeVoid at: sdevoid@vsea.org or call 802-223-5247.

DCF Sends Memo, Detailing Protocols For Service Delivery During Coronavirus Crisis

Department for Children and Families (DCF) Deputy Commissioner Sean Brown emailed a memo to employees yesterday that details the protocols the DCF is instructing it benefit-program employees to follow for the foreseeable future, due to coronavirus threat.

It begins:

"As of Friday March 13, 2020 we are temporarily waiving in person contact requirements for our benefit programs until further notice."

Find a link to the full memo on VSEA.org

State Colleges' Unit At Impasse With Chancellor On New Agreement

After months of negotiating between VSEA's Vermont State Colleges' (VSC) Bargaining Team and the Chancellor's Office, the sides recently—and unfortunately—reached impasse, which means the next step in the process is mediation. VSEA represents 165 administrative and maintenance employees at VSC campuses across Vermont.

According to VSEA Strategic Analyst Adam Norton, the main issues that led to impasse were the Chancellor's Office's wanting to impose high-deductible (hence, unaffordable) health care coverage and be granted permission to privatize bargaining unit work.

"If you combine the wage package being offered by the Chancellor with the concessions he's demanding for these Unit members, it equates to a pay cut for most VSCSF staff," explains Norton.

VSEA VSC Unit members are strategizing about next steps in their contract fight, and they are also talking with their Team, as they prepare for upcoming mediation. Early next week, VSEA will almost certainly

Continued on page 4

Continued from page 3:

be asking the membership and retirees to engage in the VSC members' contract fight in whatever way the Team thinks is beneficial. Thanks in advance for your help.

Revamped VSEA Website Goes Live Next Week!

VSEA's Communications Department is pleased to report that some long-overdue maintenance on your union's website is finally nearing completion. The site is expected to live early next week, pending any last-minute hiccups.

"Members, retirees and visitors to the revamped site will notice it has a slightly different look and that the site's functionality is improved, especially on mobile devices," says VSEA Communications Specialist Kris Lizzari. "There will still be some fine-tuning to do, but we're happy with how the new site turned out." He adds that members will be able to register for new accounts when the site goes live next week.

Members and retirees experiencing issues with the VSEA website, once it is live, should contact the VSEA Communications Department. Please also share any corrections to posted information you may discover.

It's Time To Turn Up The Volume! *Action Alert: Keep Woodside Open!*

Time is running out to save Woodside, so please, take 30 seconds today to call the State House at (802) 828-2228. Leave this simple message for your Representative:

"Keep Woodside Open!"

Thank you!

Update!

State officials testified this week that none of the four "Request for Proposal" bids submitted recently by private firms to replace Woodside's services were found to be satisfactory. Alarmingly, this leaves the state of Vermont without a backfill for the Woodside facility, which the Administration wants to close on July 1. This is a scary thought. Vermont's at-risk youth deserve the best care our state can provide and, until a true replacement for Woodside can be found, how can Vermonters, in good conscious, allow Woodside to be shuttered?

In other developments, it does sound like the State is prepared to send at-risk youth charged with an adult crime to the Marble Valley Correctional Facility in Rutland.

Reminder! March 31 Is The Deadline To Submit VSEA Bylaw Changes

The deadline to submit proposals for changes to VSEA's Master Bylaws is **Tuesday, March 31, 2020**. Proposals must be mailed to: Tim Belcher, General Counsel, c/o VSEA Headquarters, 155 State Street, Montpelier, VT 05602.

Proposals should reference the number, section, sub-section, etc. of the bylaw you would like to change. You should also include the language you want to add, delete or substitute. Also include the reason(s) you are making this proposal. Example: "Bylaw 0 A (1) (b) Change: Monday to Sunday. Reason: Makes it easier to work with the calendar."

Please be sure the changes you are recommending include all Articles and/or Bylaws that may be affected by the proposed change. If you have questions, please contact Tim by email at tbelcher@vsea.org.

Next Council Meeting:

Friday, May 29
Castleton University
Castelton, VT
8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Mark The Date!

VSEA's Spring Membership Drive!

Recruit Members, Win Prizes!

Flyer on page 7!

After a very successful membership-recruitment initiative this past winter, VSEA is excited to announce a new membership drive for the next quarter!

Never forget that ongoing recruitment is vital to the strength of your union!

- Members who recruit **TWO** members will receive a **VSEA insulated travel mug**;
- Members who recruit **FIVE** new members will receive a **dues holiday for a month**; and
- Members who recruit **TEN** new members will receive a check for **$50!**

Every time you recruit a new member between now and May 31, your name is entered into a drawing. **Four names will be pulled at random and winners will receive a check for $100!**

Just be sure your recruits include your name in the "Recruited by" section of the VSEA Membership Application.

We Are Stronger When We Stick Together!

Need a quick reference to help with your recruiting? You can view an informational webpage with some recruitment tips and advice on VSEA.org. You can also request a link by emailing vsea@vsea.org.
If you have any questions or want a list of non-members in your area, please contact VSEA Director of Operations and Organizing Amy Kinsell by email: akinsell@vsea.org

Help Spread The Word!
Print and post the flyer on page 7 in your worksite! Thanks!

Quote Of The Week!

"Our staff, this is what they're passionate about. We're prepared to handle this. We know the precautions to take."

VDH Laboratory Health Surveillance Division Director Helen Reid, commenting in a *VTDigger* story this week about preparations the lab is taking to confront the coronavirus threat.

VSEA appreciates the dedication and commitment of every state employee who is on the frontline of the coronavirus fight right here in Vermont. Stay safe and let your union know if you have questions about anything you might be asked to do that you think is unsafe and could harm you or the public at large.

Talking Points:

Sampling Of What Other Governors Are Doing To Confront Coronoavirus Threat

WBFO public radio in Buffalo posted a summary this morning of some of the actions governors nationwide are taking to confront the coronavirus threat.

It begins:

Governors around the U.S. are taking a variety of steps to try to contain the spread of coronavirus and protect the public.

More than 30 state leaders, as well as officials from Washington, D.C., have declared states of emergency, clearing the path to respond to the dangers posed by the COVID-19 pandemic as experts warn the number of cases will increase in future weeks.

Connecticut Lawmakers Advance Bill To "Push Back" On *Janus* Ruling

From a *Yankee Institute for Public Policy* March 12 post:

The Labor and Public Employees Committee approved a bill that would give public employee unions unfettered access to employees' personal information and work orientations and would codify union membership cards into state law.

The legislation is seen as a push-back by labor unions against the Supreme Court's 2018 ruling in Janus v. AFSCME, which said public employees could no longer be forced to pay union fees as a condition of employment under their First Amendment right to free speech.

The bill would provide Connecticut's labor unions with employees' personal contact information, allow union representatives to meet with new employees during their work orientations, use public facilities to conduct meetings and make dues authorizations in union membership cards a matter of state law, meaning that even if a worker resigned union membership he or she will still have to pay dues for a set period of time.

The bill would also not allow the state to share public employee information without outside organizations that might inform workers of their right to resign union membership.

Getting Ready To Retire? Retired Already? Join The VSEA Retired Members' Chapter!

Long-time VSEA activist and leader Terry Lefebvre is asking VSEA members getting ready to retire to join the VSEA Retirees' Chapter to continue to be an active and engaged union member, even in retirement. Lefebvre also appeals to VSEA members to talk up the co-workers they know who might be preparing to retire. If you already belong to the Retired Members' Chapter, a big thanks to you.

Learn more about the VSEA Retired Members' Chapter by calling 802-223-5247 or emailing VSEARetirees@gmail.com. You can also log onto www.vsea.org/retirees

Next Week's Calendar:

March 18
OSA Unit Bargaining
VSEA HQ
155 State Street
Montpelier
8:00 a.m.

March 19
Child & Elder Care Committee Meeting
VSEA HQ
155 State Street
Montpelier
9:00 a.m.

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vsea@vsea.org

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Spring Membership Drive!

March 1 - May 31, 2020

After a very successful membership-recruitment initiative this past winter, VSEA is excited to announce a new membership drive for the next quarter! Never forget that ongoing recruitment is vital to the strength of your union!

- Members who recruit **TWO** members will receive a VSEA **insulated travel mug**;
- Members who recruit **FIVE** new members will receive a **dues holiday for a month**; and
- Members who recruit **TEN** new members will receive a check for **$50!**

Every time you recruit a new member during the designated period, your name is entered into a drawing. **Four names will be pulled at random and winners will receive a check for $100!**

We Are Stronger When We Stick Together!

If you have any questions, or want a list of non-members in your area, please contact VSEA Director of Operations and Organizing Amy Kinsell by email: akinsell@vsea.org