Status Of Important VSEA Budget Items & Bills, As 2019 Session Draws To Close

ESD Positions Saved!

NOTE: As WIA is publishing, the Senate and House have still not reached agreement on the minimum wage and FMLA bills. The information below on these two bills may soon change.

As the legislative is coming to a close (so they say...), VSEA’s legislative team worked hard this week to produce this summary of where the budget issues and bills important to VSEA members are as WIA is publishing. As you’ll see, most of the news so far has been pretty good for VSEA members and retirees.

VSEA Budget Issues:

ESD Positions Saved!

ON THE TABLE: The House budget accepted the Governor’s proposal to cut $1.6 million from the Parent Child Centers and allow DCF ESD employees to administer Reach-Up benefits for all clients in Vermont. The Senate budget cut ESD staff by $1.2 million and cut the Parent Child Centers by $400,000.

END RESULT: House proposal was accepted, which cuts funding to the Parent Child Centers, but the $1.6 million cut was mitigated by increasing the Parent Child Center’s master grant by $1.3 million.
As such, there will be no RIFs in ESD resulting from this year’s budget!

**Woodside Keeping Its Doors Open!**

**On The Table:** The Senate budget proposed to cut Woodside’s $6.3 million budget by $525,000; however, it also mitigated the cut with $200,000 in one-time “bridge” funding. The House budget fully funded Woodside.

**End Result:** Woodside’s budget was cut by $460,000, but also included was an additional $260,000 in one-time “bridge” funding. Language was included in the budget to allow Woodside to collect reimbursement from the Education Fund for education-related expenses, further mitigating the impact of the loss to the General Fund.

**DCF Family Services Division Gets More Employees:**

**On The Table:** The House and Senate Appropriations Committees drafted competing proposals to help DCF’s Family Services Division employees cope with increasing caseloads. The House proposed creating Human Services Case Aide positions, while the Senate created Family Service Worker positions.

**End Result:** Opted to create seven Family Service Worker positions and transfer two vacancies from ESD for an additional two Family Service Workers.

**Funding Increased For Vermont State Colleges:**

**On The Table:** The Governor’s budget included a $3 million (11%) increase in state funding for the Vermont State Colleges. The House accepted the Governor’s proposed $3 million increase. The Senate approved a $2.5 million increase for the Vermont State Colleges.

**End Result:** Agreed to a $2.5 million increase, with an additional $500,000 in one-time money.

**Salisbury Fish Hatchery Saved!**

The House and Senate both rejected the Governor’s proposal to close the Salisbury Fish Hatchery. The House and Senate agreed to raise fishing license costs by $2 and appropriate $160,000 from the General Fund to keep the fish hatchery open for FY20.

**Status Of Other Key VSEA Bills:**

Here, listed below, are updates on additional key bills that VSEA was monitoring throughout the session, including how they resolved—or didn’t—yet:

**New State Government Positions:**

S. 134 passes, creating 30 new Correctional Officer I positions in the Department of Corrections. The bill, which now heads to the Governor’s desk for his approval, also contains language requiring new studies on the use and potential misuse of temporary positions in state government.

**Arbitration Bill’s Future Rests With Governor:**

H. 16 includes language to grant VSEA members in the Executive Branch and the Department of State’s Attorneys and Sheriffs access to neutral arbitration in the “last-best-offer” phase of contract negotiations. The bill passed out of the House successfully last Friday and is headed to the Governor’s desk for his approval.

**Minimum Wage Rising But Unclear Yet How Much:**

On Wednesday morning, VSEA’s partners provided the following update on the livable wage legislation that is currently being considered at the State House. The Senate took rapid action on Tuesday to set aside work on its initial minimum wage bill, S. 23, and instead amended a House Bill, H.351 with a proposal to raise the minimum wage to $12.50

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by 2021 (with an increase to $12.50 by 2021 and an increase to $12.50 in the following year).

As of Wednesday afternoon, some members of the House Commerce Committee are suggesting a counterproposal that would see the minimum wage raised to $15.52 by 2026. Legislators from both chambers are meeting to discuss both proposals.

**Family Leave Bill’s Future Unclear:**

As of Wednesday afternoon, the Senate is holding H. 107, the Family and Medical Leave bill, back from its third and final reading as a part of ongoing negotiations with the House on the competing minimum wage proposals. Our coalition partners suggest that the resolution to this impasse is “unclear at this time.”

**Capital Bill Funds Exploration Of New Prison & MSRF Replacement:**

The Capital Bill, a bill that governs the construction of State properties now:

- Includes “$200,000.00 to assess relative costs and resource requirements for potential construction of a correctional facility” in line with the results of an as-yet-to-be-completed Council of State Governments’ study on Vermont’s correctional facilities, but notes that “the funds shall only become available after approval by the Joint Fiscal Committee and the Joint Legislative Justice Oversight Committee.”

- “Details that that study is to assess the population trends and programming in the State’s corrections system,” and says the report “shall inform infrastructure needs for State correctional facilities.” As a part of the study, the State will “conduct a review of programming, transitional services, and population trends in Vermont’s correctional facilities. The review may include an evaluation of the women’s population in Vermont and the programming and services needed to meet their needs, the detention population, and barriers that exist to reducing the population.”

- Continues to include language stating the intent of the Legislature to replace the Middlesex Secure Residential Facility with a State-owned, 16-bed Secure Residential Facility. The bill now also requires reports to multiple legislative committees on the mental health needs of the State, and authorizes the commencement of negotiations with Rutland Regional Medical Center for up to eight interim beds if, in the opinion of the Secretary of Human Services, the analysis of state needs supports the need for such beds.

**Call Governor TODAY to Ensure VSEA Members Get a Fair Shake at the Bargaining Table**

VSEA sent out an action alert this morning, asking members and retirees to call the Governor’s office to urge him to sign H. 16; legislation that would guarantee VSEA members have access to a neutral arbitrator in contract negotiations. The legislature passed the bill and sent it to the Governor’s desk for his signature.

Here’s a reminder of what the alert asked:

**Please take 30 seconds—on your break, and on your own phone—to call the Governor’s Office at (802) 828-3333 and leave this message:**

“Please sign H 16. I support arbitration for first responders and state employees.”

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This bill will help ensure that the final outcome of bargaining for many VSEA members is determined by somebody your union helps choose, rather than somebody appointed solely by the Administration.

YOUR CALLS helped get this bill passed through the legislature and now we need your help one more time to get this bill signed.

Time Running Out! See The Red Sox With Your Union In June!

Saturday, June 8
Red Sox vs. Tampa Bay Rays

$111.00 Per Person. Includes a ride to the park and a ticket to the game.

Bus Pick-Up Locations:
   Waterbury – 7:00 am
   White River Junction – 8:00 am

To Purchase Tickets, or if you have questions, please contact either: Bob South at VSEA: bsouth@vsea.org, 802-223-5247 or Sue DeVoid at VSEA: sdevoid@vsea.org, 802-223-5247. Payment must be received before tickets are released. No refunds on purchased tickets.

Monday, June 3, Is The Deadline To Submit Your District Board Of Trustee Candidate Petition!

Monday, June 3, 2019, is the deadline for interested VSEA members to submit a petition to run for one of the following VSEA Board of Trustee District seats:

- District 1 Trustee (Central Vermont, Barre)
- District 2 Trustee (Waterbury, Vermont Psychiatric Care Hospital)
- District 5 Trustee (Bennington, Rutland)

Also, VSEA members interested in running to be a VSEA officer have until July 16, 2019, to submit a candidate petition to be:

- President
- First Vice President
- Second Vice President
- Clerk
- Treasurer

Download petitions or learn more on VSEA.org

Reminder: June Council Meeting Date Change!

VSEA First Vice President Aimee Towne is reminding Council members that the June 13 Council meeting has been rescheduled to Wednesday, June 26. The meeting will be held at Vermont Technical College (VTC).

For more information or if you have questions please email VSEA First Vice President Aimee Towne: ATowne@vsea.org

VSEA Members Set To Rally In Burlington On May 30 Against Scott Walker!

The Vermont labor community met this week to formalize plans for a rally / picket outside the Hilton Hotel in Burlington on May 30. That night, notorious anti-union, ex-Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker is speaking at a fundraiser there. Walker’s visit comes eight years after working Vermonters and their unions, including VSEA, participated in an anti-Scott Walker solidarity rally to support Wisconsin workers, who were under attack from their governor.

NEW! If you are coming to the picket and want to meet up with other VSEA members and retirees, come to the William Wells statue in Burlington’s Battery Park at 4:50
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p.m. From there, the VSEA contingent will march together to the stage area in a show of solidarity. Members and retirees are being urged to wear something that identifies you as VSEA.

Here’s how the evening is going to go:

- **5:00 p.m.** Meet in front of Battery Park stage
- **5:30 p.m.** March to Hilton
- Picket in front of hotel and rally across street
- **7:15 p.m** Picket / rally concludes

Hope To See You At The Picket!

**Here are reasons to join the picket:**

## Walker is a Paid Agent of the 1 Percent

Billionaires Charles and David Koch and their pro-business front groups poured millions of dollars into Walker’s Gubernatorial campaigns in Wisconsin.

## Walker Busted Unions

As Governor of Wisconsin, he enacted a law that stripped public sector unions of their right to collective bargaining and blocked private sector unions from collecting agency fees from workers they represent.

## Walker Attacked Programs for Workers

He prevented any increase in the minimum wage, rolled back enforcement of equal pay protections, and purged thousands of Wisconsinites from the state’s BadgerCare health insurance program.

## Walker Privatized Public Education

He carried out the largest per-student K-12 education cuts in the nation and redirected public funds towards private charter schools.

### Quote Of The Week!

“They may take our lives, but they’ll never take our house plants.”

Florida Department of Management Services’ employee’s posted a response to a memo, informing workers that “Boston ferns, peace lilies and palms may be banned from the offices...” As reported this week in the *Tallahassee Democrat.*

### 70% Of Vermont’s Exempt State Employees Opt For Defined Benefit Pension Plan

A few weeks back, WIA shared a piece about a majority of Pennsylvania lawmakers, who were given a choice between remaining in a defined benefit pension plan or going into a 401(k) pension plan, opting to remain in their defined benefit plan, even after voting to make the 401(k) plan mandatory for new hires to state government. This made WIA wonder how many exempt Vermont state employees have switched to the 401(k) plan from the defined benefit plan, since, according to a March 2019 memo from the Treasurer’s Office, lawmakers first put the offer on the table in 2000.

With the constant drum beat by some Vermont anti-union, think-tank wonks to make 401(k) pension plans mandatory for new hires, or even existing employees, its heartening to know that, in 2018, 70% of eligible “non-classified, exempt” state employees opted to stay in the defined benefit pension plan, given a choice.

The Treasurer’s data supports VSEA’s steadfast belief that defined benefit pension plans are far more desirable to Vermonters then 401(k)s.
**NMU Sick Leave Bank Nearly Bankrupt!**

It’s open enrollment time to donate some hours to the NMU Sick Leave Bank, which is on the brink of bankruptcy and needs your help.

Please consider donating as much Annual and/ or Personal leave as you are able to contribute.

Donating an hour of your time can mean the world to a fellow employee, who, along with their families, are struggling due to serious health issues.

Please print the Sick Leave Bank Donation Form on the DHR website, complete it, and forward it to your Human Resources Administrator between now and June 30, 2019.

Many thanks to those who previously donated time to the Sick Leave Bank. Your generosity is making a difference!

**Reserve Your Room Now For VSEA’s 2019 Annual Meeting At Okemo**

You can reserve a room now through a special link created by Okemo. VSEA members will need to use a special rate code for the event, which is: **CM2VSEA.** Reserve Room Now Online Here:  [https://www.okemo.com/groups/group-promo-package/](https://www.okemo.com/groups/group-promo-package/)

Room types available:

- **Inn Room** (occupancy 2-4)
  1 to 2 nights = $159 per night
  3 nights = $144.54

- **Studio** (occupancy 2-4)
  1 to 2 nights = $173 per night
  3 nights = $157.27

- **One-Bedroom** (occupancy 2-6)
  1 to 2 nights = $195 per night
  3 nights = $177.63

- **Two-Bedroom** (occupancy 4-6)
  1 to 2 nights = $235 per night
  3 nights = $213.63

**Talking Points:**

**IL Lawmakers Push To Make Assaulting A Social Worker A Class 1 Felony**

The *Southern Illinoisan* reports this morning that a group of state lawmakers is urging the Senate to pass a bill to increase the penalties for attacks on state social workers employed by the Department of Children and Family Services.

The bill, in response to the death of DCFS caseworker Pam Knight early last year in Whiteside County, makes it a Class 1 felony to batter a DCFS worker in the performance of official duties — the same protections against battery are given to police, firefighters and peace officers.

“The job of DCFS investigators is difficult, thankless and dangerous,” says Sen. Brian Stewart, who sponsored the bill in the Senate. “Right now, police officers, firefighters and other peace officers are protected by the law. DCFS investigators should have the same protections.”

Note: In 2016, with VSEA DCF workers’ lobbying and support, the VT legislature passed S. 154, which aligned “charges and penalties related to assaulting a social worker to that of assaulting a police officer, first responder, or medical provider — all which carry a stronger penalty than assault of an average person.
Privatization Fail. Michigan Returns State Employees To Work In Prison Kitchens & Problems “Drop Dramatically”

The Detroit Free Press published a story this week, titled, “Problem-Plagued Prison Kitchens Better After Private Contracts End, Officials Say”

From the story:

Problems have dropped dramatically 10 months after the state of Michigan ended a privatization experiment and returned state employees to prison kitchens, according to the Corrections Department.

During the 56 months that Aramark Correctional Services and later Trinity Services Group ran the kitchens under multimillion-dollar contracts, the Corrections Department had to issue “stop orders” to 412 of their employees, banning them from prison property for various infractions such as smuggling or getting too familiar with prisoners, for an average of 7.4 such orders per month, spokesman Chris Gautz told the Free Press.

Since state employees returned, there have been 16 stop orders, or an average of 1.6 per month, Gautz said.

The kitchens are also cleaner and more fully staffed and the meals are much more likely to be served on time, Gautz said.

Gautz said one of the biggest changes is “dramatically lower staff turnover,” compared with when kitchen contractors were used.

“Trinity and Aramark both churned through employees constantly,” he said. As a result, “you had people with only a few weeks of experience showing the ropes to the newest employee off the street.”

Note: VSEA has been asking lawmakers for years to explore putting prisoner health care back in the hands of state employees, as opposed to a private contractor.

Pro Women Hockey Players Form Union

The Associated Press reported this week on a recent decision by more than 200 of the world’s top women’s hockey players to form a union. The Professional Women’s Hockey Players Association said paperwork was filed last Friday to help push for the creation of a “single, viable women’s professional league in North America.”

The association made it clear it wants a league that provides health insurance, money and infrastructure along with support for training programs.

“We are prepared to stop playing for a year, which is crushing to even think about, because we know how important a sustainable league will be to the future of women’s sports,” Canadian national team goalie Shannon Szabados said. “We know we can make this work, and we want the chance to try.”

Video Game Developers Get Ready To Say “Union Yes!”

Bloomberg Law reports this week that video game developers working at some of the nation’s largest gaming studios are gearing up to begin a drive to organize themselves under the banner “Game Workers Unite!” Long hours, unpredictable schedules and “precarious security” are some of the workers’ primary reasons to organize.

From the story:

Multiple organizing campaigns are underway at gaming studios that haven’t been made public, one organizer, who goes by Emma Kinema, said.

It’s a fast-paced development coming only about a year after the first mumblings of unionizing began in earnest during a game developers conference, according to Kinema, who’s affiliated with Game

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Workers Unite!—a worker-run advocacy group that’s laying the groundwork for unionizing.

“We saw that vacuum, we saw that need, and we just started running,” said Kinema, who goes by a pseudonym for fear of reprisal at her job in the industry. The GWU volunteer estimates that the group has thousands of members spread across more than two dozen domestic and international chapters. The group doesn’t have an official membership count and hasn’t disclosed the companies where members work.

The last time organized labor attempted to break into a tech-heavy entertainment space, it didn’t go well. A 2012 bid by the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees to organize visual effects workers at Sony and other studios fizzled out.

VSEA Calendar:

May 28
NMU Executive Team Conference Call

May 30
Organizer’s Worksite Meeting: AOE
Barre City Place
Second Floor Conference Room
Barre
12:00 p.m.

May 30
Rally w/ Labor Against Scott Walker
Hilton Hotel
60 Battery Street
Burlington
5:30 p.m.

June 3
Candidate Petition Deadline:
District Trustee

June 6
Board of Trustees’ Meeting
VSEA HQ
155 State Street
Montpelier
9:00 a.m.

June 8
VSEA Day at Fenway

What is the VSEA Advantage Discount Program?

Did you know? The average VSEA member can save hundreds of dollars a year by taking advantage of some of the Members Only benefits offered through their union!

Learn More On VSEA.org