

Answers to First Round VSEA Questionnaire by Democratic Candidate H. Brooke Paige

Question #1 – “Should the work of State government be performed by State employees ?”

Vermont government has a myriad of responsibilities to the citizens of the state. In order to prevent the taxpayers from being overburdened by taxes and fees, the state must accomplish these duties in the most cost effective way possible. Many of these tasks are so important that should only be entrusted to state employees – those who work for the Department of Families and Children, in law enforcement, the judicial system, revenue and corrections are examples. There are other necessary tasks which do not involve confidentiality which should be performed using the most reliable, cost effective method available. Many of these tasks can be most effectively performed by state workers while others need to be contracted to obtain necessary expertise, such as information technology, or where the work requires specialized equipment and tradespeople, such a bridgework and major road construction.

Question #2 – “As an elected official, how would you improve the overall safety of state employees ?”

The safety of Vermont employees was believed to be a minor issue in the past, however with the tragic murder of the DCF case worker, Lara Sobel, and recent security issues in Vermont courthouses – this is no longer the case. I believe a top to bottom review is already underway and the result of that review should be implemented as soon as deficiencies are identified. The state should be proactive in identifying security issues and responsive to employee concerns to prevent troubles before they become catastrophic events.

Question #3 – “What is your plan to make the health care system more fair and equitable for working Vermonters ?

Vermont has one of the best Healthcare delivery systems in the nation. To the extent that we had a problem before the establishment of the Green Mountain Care Board and the implementation Vermont Health Connect – it was one of access for those without insurance who did not qualify for financial assistance. Today the implementation of the Affordable Care Act, the Green Mountain Care Board, Vermont Health Connect and the massive increase in Medicaid participants that resulted from their actions, has significantly worsened the healthcare landscape. These forces have placed significantly greater financial burdens of patients, providers and insurance policy holders while at the same time limiting or eliminating the availability of services in some parts of the state.

Of special concern has been the rapidly escalating policy costs, co-pays and deductibles which have resulted in many Vermonters, who were previously insured, to become unable to continue their insurance coverage.

While some of the problems will be difficult to reverse, three specific changes would help to reduce the issues of costs and improve the availability of services. First, opening insurance and provider services to interstate competition would quickly help to reduce costs and increase the quantity and

quality of available services. Second, the elimination of Certificates of Need would promptly increase the availability and variety of services available while driving costs down. Third, implement "tort reform." A significant part of healthcare costs can be traced to the outrageous expenses related to malpractice and liability insurance for providers and manufacturers in the medical field. A major reason these insurances are so costly is frivolous and fraudulent claims an issue which tort reform would address.

Question #4 – "Will you support collective bargaining and vote against "Right to Work" legislation in any form?"

I am a strong proponent of collective bargaining and union representation in the workplace. I believe that union representation levels "the playing field" between employee and employer. I believe that when employees work in a union shop all of the employees have an obligation to pay dues to support the organization that represents them. I do not believe that employees, who do not wish to support the union's political activities, should not be compelled to support this activity - financially or otherwise.

Question #5 – "What do you see as the role of the State employees and how would you support them in their role?"

State employees facilitate the many varied activities of the government. It is through their diligence that all Vermonters enjoy the benefits and advantages of living here. The governor, as the chief executive of the state, needs to lead by example and work diligently to ensure every citizen has the opportunity to live a safe and secure life, and to encourage every state employee under his direction to do the same.

Further, the physical and financial safety and security of the state employees should be the highest priority of the governor, the state's chief financial officer – just as the employees of a company or corporation are of paramount importance to the owner or CEO.

Question #6 – "What mechanisms would you put in place to avoid budget shortfalls?"

In recent years, the Vermont Legislature has not had the will or discipline to match the expenses of operating the state with the anticipated revenue stream. Excessive optimism in projecting both expenses and revenue has resulted in a "triage mentality" to resolve the differences when they arise, generally after the Legislature has completed its work for the year. This inadequate budgeting has also created rolling shortfalls when the Legislature arrives each winter, tasked with funding the insufficiency in the current year and adjusting their calculations for the next year's budget being considered during the session. The required "mechanism" which is needed requires taking a realistic, or slightly pessimistic, position in the budget process allowing Vermonters to occasionally be pleasantly surprised when actual operations exceed anticipation instead of being constantly "disappointed."

As to specifics on reducing expenses these are many small things that can be done to streamline operations by coordinating interdepartmental activities, a prime example is improving the state's purchasing activities and sharing the found savings with local governmental entities who wish to participate. The state needs to reconsider those activities that are not essential to the operation of government, the duties of the Agency of Commerce is one department that could be streamlined and/or have its activities more directly financed by its beneficiaries.

Question #7 – "What approach would you take to make higher education affordable for Vermonters ?

The State's Universities and Colleges themselves need to do some "soul searching" as to what their objectives should be today and what we as citizens expect of their organization – this analysis should result in some cost savings and improved performance. To the extent that the organizations wish to pursue esoteric goals which are not supported by the public at large - these costs should be covered by fundraising targeted to funding these activities. For those activities which the public (and the taxpayers) strongly support, their requests should be specific as to the need and funds required.

Independent of providing funds to the institutions directly, the state should continue to financially assist Vermont students who have demonstrated scholarship worthy of the taxpayers support. We need to face the reality that not every high school graduate needs or desires to pursue a college degree. Many graduates are more suited for, and will be better served by, vocational training and/or employer apprenticeship with these programs should be more aggressively promoted and financial assisted.

Question #8 – "What would you do to ensure the viability of the state college system ?"

My answer to question #7 apply to this question as well. The state college system must examine the "marketplace" and confirm that the opportunities they offer match the needs of their students and will provide their graduates with skills that will serve them well in securing gainful employment and a finding a rewarding life. Just as in the private sector; failure to adapt to changing demands of the consumer, in this case potential student, will result in the educational institutes becoming as obsolete as the buggy whip industry.

Question #9 – "Do you support a livable wage for Vermonters ? If so, what do you think that amount should be ?

Of course, I think everyone would agree that those who work full time deserve a "livable" wage.

It is the responsibility of the employee to develop marketable skills that are needed by employers through education opportunities and vocational training provided by state and local government and apprenticeships available from employers. Possessing marketable skills is the key to earning a livable wage. Unfortunately many citizens have not acquired such skills and find themselves dependent on the community and government to help them sustain themselves and their families. In Vermont the value of the social services provided to those citizens in need is estimated to be the equivalent of

about \$21.00/hr. This figure is probably the best estimate of what represents a “livable” wage. Obviously the disparity between Vermont’s current minimum wage of 10.50/hr. and the \$21.00/hr. figure is troubling. It cannot be resolved by mandating that employers pay all of their employees a minimum wage of \$15 or \$20 per hour, at least in the foreseeable future. At the same time, taxpayers already make up the difference by subsidizing the employees’ living expenses through: 3Squares, WIC, section 8 housing allowances and other programs. There are solutions to the problem, however unless we wish to bankrupt employers, create significant new unemployment and prompt a mass exodus of employers – the solution requires new creative thinking and follow-through.

Question #10 – “Briefly state why the VSEA should endorse you and describe the types of assistance that you would be seeking from a VSEA endorsement.

As I have state in my attached letter, I believe it is appropriate for VSEA to provide my questionnaire answers to the membership; however I believe that endorsing individual candidates is not appropriate and I am not seeking endorsement or assistance from VSEA.