**VSEA WEEK IN ACTION!**

Weekly News From Your Union ~ April 7, 2014 – April 11, 2014

**VSEA Launches Facebook Page To Support Rank-and-File Whistleblower**

VSEA launched a [Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/JusticeForJohnHowe?ref=hl) this week to support a VSEA leader’s campaign to end management retaliation against frontline workers who speak out against or blow the whistle on waste, fraud and corruption in state government. The VSEA leader is fighting back against what he alleges are frivolous charges brought against him by management because of his testimony in January against the State’s use of an expensive private contractor. He says he’s taking on the battle not only for himself, but for all Vermonters who speak out against waste, fraud and corruption. VSEA members on Facebook are urged to read about this leader’s fight, like the Facebook page and then please share it with all you friends.

 An excellent overview of this worker’s struggle appeared this week on VPR, and it can be found by [clicking here](http://digital.vpr.net/post/state-workers-union-alleges-retaliation-management).

Monday Solidarity Event For VSEA Whistleblower

 VSEA members in and near Burlington are invited to join this VSEA whistleblower on Monday morning, as he returns to work a week after receiving notice he was being placed on 30-day administrative leave, pending an investigation. Supporters and friends are asked to meet at Uncommon Grounds in Burlington (42 Church St.) on Monday morning at 7:30 a.m. to join and walk a short distance with this whistleblower as he returns to work.

**BGS Agrees To Allow Workers To Wear Union Buttons. Admits Worker Should Not Have Been Made To Remove Button Supporting Colleague**

 VSEA has reached agreement with the Department of Buildings and General Services (BGS) on a new policy that will prevent BGS management from being able to force an employee to remove a pin that contains content or a message that supports/promotes their union, or a union campaign.

 The agreement is the result of an unfair labor practice VSEA recently filed against a BGS manager who instructed a union member to remove her VSEA-produced pin reading “I Support Sid.” Sid is a rank-and-file BGS employee who co-workers wanted to help because they felt strongly he was being unfairly treated by management.

 Per the agreement, BGS is hanging a notice of the pin policy in all BGS worksites. In part it reads:

In furtherance of these rights,

 BGS will not, absent special circumstances:

* prohibit you from wearing union buttons, conveying messages of mutual aid and protection;
* direct you to remove such buttons; or
* interfere with, restrain, or coerce you in the exercise of the rights guaranteed to you by Section 903 of the State Labor Relations Act.

Congratulations to this group of BGS workers for fighting and winning the good fight.

**VSEA First VP Speaks In Favor Of Vermont Raising Its Minimum Wage**

VSEA First Vice President Michelle Salvador represented the union well at yesterday’s multi-group press conference at the State House to urge the Vermont Senate to follow the House’s lead and pass H. 552; legislation that would increase the state’s minimum wage to $10.10 per hour from the current $8.73. The increase would take effect in January 2015.
 Joining other community, labor and religious group leaders, Salvador used her time to say, in part:

 “The Vermont State Employees’ Association stands with you today to demand an increase in the minimum wage so that Vermonters may live with dignity!

 Research has proven that increasing the minimum wage does not, in fact, result in reduced unemployment. In truth, higher wages actually result in less turnover, which is costly to employers, and they increase consumer spending, which boosts the economy. Putting money into the pockets of Vermonters is a good thing!

  Research has also taught us that childhood poverty in Vermont has increased 25% since 2007. Childhood poverty has lasting impacts that ultimately affect all of us. The effects of poverty on health are well documented. Poor children have increased infant mortality rates, more frequent chronic diseases, such as asthma, poorer nutrition and growth, less access to quality health care, lower immunization rates and increased obesity and the complications accompanying it. Not to mention the impacts on an individual’s emotional well-being.

  Minimum wage increases are a counter to growing economic inequality.

 New studies document that minimum wage increases have not caused employment losses. In fact, new research shows that there is almost no direct correlation between increasing the minimum wage and job loss.

  Let me add that it is very frustrating for state employees like me to see our tax dollars being used to subsidize low-wage employers. This prevents state government from investing in other underfunded priorities like adequate staffing.

  Until just recently some of our VSEA members working for our State's Colleges were not receiving adequate pay and many were forced to rely on public assistance to make ends meet. In fact, prior to bargaining this year, VSEA estimated that some 25 % of our States Colleges members were receiving less than Vermont's livable wage. To their credit our members mobilized, much like we are doing here today, and waged a broad-based public and state wide contract campaign to protect and enhance their pay.  I'm proud to say that they were successful and that they bargained a contract that for the first time ever established a liveable wage for all members belonging to that unit!

 Never give up on this fight. It is a fight for dignity, for eqaulity for everyone! It is a necessary fight for the future of our state, our residents, our families and children. VSEA is proud to support this effort and offer our Union's solidarity and help. Thank you.”

**National Report Finds Big Problems With Vermont’s Mental Health Delivery System**

 A report released this week from the national Treatment Advocacy Center is less than flattering to the mighty fall of Vermont’s mental health delivery system. The report’s special Vermont section leads with: “It is hard to believe that 25 years ago, Vermont was ranked among the best states in public services for seriously mentally ill individuals; today, it ranks among the worst. When Tropical Storm Irene flooded the 54-bed Vermont State Hospital in 2011, officials closed the hospital and simply gave up. Today, [Vermont] is the only state without a public hospital for the hospitalization of psychiatric patients.” The report continues “…most institutionalized mentally ill individuals are in the prisons, such as the Southern State Correctional Facility in Springfield.”

 “Unfortunately, the report’s analysis is not surprising to VSEA members who work—and worked until being cut after Irene—for the department of mental health,” said VSEA Communications Coordinator Doug Gibson. “With the scant resources they were provided up until Irene, VSEA members at the old State Hospital did a fantastic job managing this vulnerable population, but their voices were largely ignored in the debate about how to shape Vermont’s post-Irene mental health delivery system. Granted, the old State Hospital was cited a few times for violations, but they were few and far between. But you look at the multiple citations issued at the Brattleboro Retreat in just the first few years it’s been treating acute mentally ill Vermonters, and you begin to understand that this is difficult, sometimes challenging work that requires the specialized workforce. And, to be honest, the Retreat is caring for just a fraction of the number of patients routinely cared for at the old State Hospital.” Gibson added that the union hears often from its Department of Corrections members who are not happy about having to deal daily with offenders battling mental illness.

 “VSEA is still not convinced 25 acute beds will be enough at the new State Hospital,” Gibson said.

 To read a copy of the Treatment Advocacy Center’s report on Vermont, [click here](http://www.tacreports.org/treatment-behind-bars/vermont).

**VSEA Schedules Information Sharing Meetings With DMV, Fish & Wildlife & Liquor Control Officers!**

 VSEA is hosting four meetings with DMV, Fish and Wildlife and Liquor Control Officers to discuss the goals and expectations of these workers and strategize about how to meet them.

 The goal of the meetings is to reconnect within VSEA to determine possible strategies that these workers may pursue to achieve certain improvements they may wish to see regarding their pay, benefits and working conditions.

Meeting Dates

April 23

Williston Barracks
277 St. George Rd
Williston, VT 05495

12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.

5:15 p.m. -6:30 p.m.

April 24

100 Mineral St.

Suite 309

Springfield, VT 05156

12:00 p.m. -1:00 p.m.

5:15 p.m. -6:00 p.m.

**VSEA Launches New Digger Ads Supporting Whistleblower Protection Bill**

 VSEA launched a new set of ads today on online media outlet [VTDigger](http://www.vtdigger.org), promoting H. 863; the Whistleblower Protection Bill. The bill protects the identity of state and municipal employees (and those who work for state contractors) who blow the whistle on workplace waste, fraud and corruption. It was passed by the Vermont House on March 27 and is now in the Senate.
 The ad steers readers to a page urging supporters of H. 863 to contact their Senators today and urge them to vote to protect Vermont Whistleblowers ([like VSEA member John Howe](http://on.fb.me/1irgZBg)).
 To view the ad’s information page, [click here](http://bit.ly/1g8bK99).

 Thanks for the help!

**Venue Change For April 16 Steward Training!**

 VSEA members registered to attend next week’s Steward Training on April 16 are being advised that the training venue has been changed. This training, “The Contract and Building the Union,” will be held in the Department of Health’s Conference Room, Second Floor, 5 Perry Street, Barre, beginning at 9:00 a.m. If you have questions, please contact VSEA Labor Educator Timothy Lenoch at 802-777-2813.

**Council Members Urged To Complete Online Survey**

VSEA First Vice President Michelle Salvador is urging Council members to complete a special online survey about your VSEA experience and how the union helps you in your daily work life. Your input is critical and will be used to help VSEA promote the union and its importance to potential new members.

 Find the survey by [clicking here](https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/VSEACouncilSupportsUVMOrganizing).
 If you have any questions, please contact VSEA Organizing Director Kristin Warner at 793-4536, or kwarner@vsea.org.

**New Retired Members’ Chapter Newsletter Is In The Mail!**

 VSEA Retirees! Keep your eyes on your mailboxes for the VSEA–Retirees’ Chapter Spring 2014 newsletter. VSEA–RC marks 10 years since it re-started, with VSEA Board of Trustees approval, as the Union’s Chapter for VSEA Lifetime members. The VSEA–RC Spring 2014 newsletter is full of concrete, specific information about “EGWP-Plus-Wrap.” Also, Retirees, please save the date now for the VSEA–RC 2014 Annual Meeting and Luncheon. It’s Wednesday, August 13, at the Montpelier Elks Club.

**Upcoming Meetings/Events/Holidays:**

**April 16**

Steward Training: The Contract & Building The Union
Dept. of Health
Conference Room, Second Floor
5 Perry St.
Barre

9:00 a.m.

**April 18**

Board Of Trustees Meeting

VSEA HQ
Montpelier

9:00 a.m.