

WEEK IN ACTION!

Weekly News From Your Union ~ May 12, 2014 – May 16, 2014

Happy Memorial Day VSEA!

VSEA President Shelley Martin and the VSEA Board of Trustees proudly join to wish all VSEA member veterans and members currently serving in America's Armed Forces a happy Memorial Day. Thank you for your service to the nation and to Vermont.

Support Judiciary Unit Members' Bargaining Efforts By Signing Public Petition

Stuck at impasse, VSEA Judiciary Unit members broadened their campaign for a fair contract this week by asking the public to sign an online petition that begins:

"Last week we, the members of the VSEA's Judiciary Bargaining Team delivered our Petition in Support of a Fair Contract to the Court Administrator's Office. More than 75% of the Judiciary Unit's employees supported and signed our petition. Now we are taking our petition to the public. Vermont's Judiciary employees face unique challenges. Over half of our members are Docket Clerks, who keep Vermont's legal system running every day. Yet among this workforce, overwhelming comprised of women, many have to work two jobs, or rely on public assistance just to get by. We know it's time for a change. Please sign on to our petition and spread the word that its time that the State of Vermont treated its Judiciary workers with respect."

To date, nearly 150 supporters have signed the online petition, but more signatures are needed. To add your name to the growing list of Vermonters who support a fair contract for Judiciary employees, please [click here](#).

Workers In Two Additional County Deputy State's Attorneys' Offices Petition For VSEA Representation

VSEA Questions Why State Dollars Are Being Used To Try And Thwart Union's Drive To Organize Municipal Workers

VSEA added two new counties this week to the list of State's Attorneys' offices where a majority of the deputy state's attorneys, victims' advocates and administrative staff have signed cards declaring their wish to collectively bargain a contract and become

VSEA members. Addison and Windham counties now join Chittenden, Franklin, Essex, Orange, Rutland and Windsor counties, accounting for 70 percent of this class of employees who will be represented by VSEA.

In a novel approach, VSEA decided in April to try and organize the workers under the Municipal Labor Relations Act (MERA), as opposed to the State Employee Labor Relations Act. That's because ever since VSEA announced its intention to organize the workers, the State has adamantly fought VSEA's contention that the workers are state employees, saying instead that they are county workers. But no sooner had VSEA filed under MERA, then the State's Attorneys' office was oddly deciding to use taxpayer dollars to hire a law firm to fight the VSEA drive at the Vermont Labor Relations Board (VLRB).

"The question we're asking is why, if the State believes these are county employees, is it now using taxpayer money to try and defeat VSEA's effort to organize these—by the State's own account—municipal workers," VSEA Staff Attorney Justin St. James told WIA. "The hiring of the law firm is not being well received by many of the workers VSEA is seeking to organize. In fact, workers in the two new county offices who petitioned this week for VSEA representation are telling us that the news about the law firm aided in the decisions of their offices to join the campaign." VSEA has filed a Freedom of Information Act request with the Department of State's Attorney's, seeking to review the contract negotiated with the law firm. "Let's see how much the State is spending to thwart a drive by county employees trying to organize."

VSEA continues to wait for the VLRB to officially rule on whether or not the State's Attorneys' workers are "state" or "municipal" employees.

VSEA Whistleblower John Howe's Fight Continues

Another busy week for VSEA leader and member John Howe, who continues to publicly fight back against the management retaliation he is experiencing for speaking out about his agency's use of a private contractor.

On Monday, John appeared on the Equal Time Radio Show with Anthony Pollina, spending more than 40 minutes discussing why he decided to fight on behalf of all state employees and why he believes it's important to shine a spotlight on the costly privatization of state services. To hear the complete interview with John, please [click here](#) (interview begins at 11:19).

On Tuesday, John was walked by supporters to the Department of Human Resources (DHR) his second formal investigation, which he emerged from three hours later, not knowing very much more than he did going in. What John did learn—and what online media outlet *VTDigger* wrote about in a Tuesday story in advance of John's investigation ([read here](#))—is that DHR's investigation of John was no longer about letting a non-state employee use his phone or sign forms, it was now about "inappropriate comments" he allegedly made to co-workers. Howe told *Digger* the new allegations are just more "trumped-up excuses" to try and wear him down and eventually fire him. Following his second investigation, Howe told *WIA* that he was disheartened to learn from DHR that "more allegations are coming" and that his investigation(s) will continue...and continue...and continue. Howe remains committed to fighting back against DHR's tactics and reaffirming every state employee's right to speak out against waste, fraud and corruption.

In an effort to broaden VSEA's anti-retaliation campaign to include more members and their stories, VSEA staff and members spent Tuesday morning and afternoon leafleting outside worksites in Montpelier and Burlington. In addition to reminding VSEA members of their rights in the workplace, the piece also includes the following:

John Howe Today. You Tomorrow? When Does The Retaliation End?

When it comes to being experts on how Vermont public services can function best and most cost effectively, there is no better resource than frontline state employees. But across state government, frontline workers are telling VSEA that a disturbing culture of management retaliation exists, and it's having a chilling effect on workers who want to come forward with information that could potentially save Vermont taxpayers a lot of money. Enter VSEA member John Howe.

John Howe saw waste in his agency and testified to lawmakers about it on his own time. In response, management harshly retaliated against him, so he stepped out of his comfort zone and asked VSEA to assist him with a public campaign to expose the retaliation he is experiencing. Howe has been clear from the outset of his campaign that his fight is for all state employees and not just him. To his credit, John's story has been reported in newspapers, on the radio and television, and it's helped shine a brighter spotlight on the issue of management retaliation, which is why we need more employees who are being—or have been—retaliated against to step forward now to join Howe and VSEA's broader fight to end management retaliation once and for all.

From a 2013 whistleblower survey VSEA conducted, we know that management retaliation is alive and well throughout state government and that employees aren't coming forward because of it. VSEA's survey found that:

- By far, the number one reason employees don't report waste, fraud, corruption, etc., is "fear of retaliation"; and
- An overwhelming number of employees report that retaliation is either "widespread" or "isolated," but almost none said it was non-existent.

VSEA reminds members that your union has taken steps legislatively to protect members against retaliation, and here is what the statutory language VSEA helped pass says:

- A state employee, as a trustee and servant of the people, shall be free to report, in good faith and with candor, waste, fraud, abuse of authority, violations of law, or a threat to the health of employees, the public, or persons under the care of the state without fear of reprisal, intimidation, or retaliation; and
- An exemption to protect the identity of persons who submit complaints about misconduct by a public agency or government contractor.

So two strong pieces of language now exist to protect state employees who want to speak out against waste, fraud and corruption. The identity protection language was just passed in 2014 with help from State Auditor Doug Hoffer, who, based on his conversations with potential state employee whistleblowers, recognized the need to augment the anti-retaliation language with the identity protection language.

With these protections now in place and a spotlight shining on the issue of management retaliation against state employees, VSEA is asking any and all members with a retaliation story to please help VSEA expand its "We Are All John Howe" anti-retaliation campaign by sharing your story and its outcome with the union. To share your retaliation story, please contact VSEA Organizer Josh Massey by email at jmassey@vsea.org or call him at 802-777-0496. All names and stories will be kept confidential unless otherwise discussed.

VSEA Launches New Digger Ads Exposing Rising Cost Of Administrative Leave

VSEA launched a new set of ads yesterday on online media outlet [VTDigger](#), exposing the rising amount of money the State is spending annually to place employees on administrative leave. According to Department of Human Resources' data, the amount of money spent annually by the State has grown 330% from the year 2000 to 2014, rising from \$330,881 to \$1.4 million. The VSEA ad also educates readers about the length of time some employees on administrative leave must wait for resolution; some as long as two years. VSEA argues that this is stressing out employees and is costing the state a lot of money in lost productivity and having to often backfill temporarily vacant positions with temp workers and others.

To view the ad's information page, [click here](#).

Deadline Is May 31 To Apply For 2014 Vermont State Colleges Staff Federation Scholarship!

A Vermont State Colleges' Staff Federation scholarship is intended to help VSEA members and their spouses, dependents or domestic partners who are seeking financial assistance to pursue post-secondary educational goals at one of the following: Castleton State College, Lyndon State College, Johnson State College or Vermont Technical College. The deadline to apply is May 31, 2014.

VSCSF scholarship applications should be sent to:

Monique Prive, Librarian
c/o Lyndon State College
P.O. Box 919
Lyndonville, VT 05851-0919

You can reach Monique by phone at 802-626-6364 or by e-mail at monique.prive@lyndonstate.edu for the application or if you have any questions.

Note: The VSCSF scholarship is not to be confused with the annual VSEA scholarship.

VSEA Advantage Discount Program Pleased To Once Again Offer Discounted Day Tickets To:

The Great Escape & Splashwater Kingdom

"Two parks of fun for the price of one!"
Lake George, New York

Park Opens Today, May 23, 2014, & Splashwater Opens May 24, 2014

Discount Tickets Now Available Through VSEA HQ & Online*

2014 Regular Day Tickets — \$31 each (\$24 Savings)

To Get Tickets

Send or drop off check (made out to VSEA), noting how many tickets you need. VSEA can mail your tickets or you can pick them up at VSEA HQ in Montpelier. VSEA members can also order tickets online by going to GE's [homepage](#), looking in the upper right-hand corner for the "Promo Code" box and entering VSEA's promo code, which can be [found here](#)*. GE Phone Number: 1-888-792-3500

New this year is the Extreme Supernova thrill ride!

Note: You must be a registered VSEA website user to view the VSEA promo code. You can sign up online [here](#).

VSEA Needs To Know If Your Mailing Address Is Different Than Your Home Address

Many VSEA members have a mailing address that is different from their home address. They may keep a P.O. Box at the post office, or they may have a mailbox with an address different from their actual house address. If this is the case with you, please email the Union at nstein@vsea.org and let us know! Our reason is that the address information for our members that we receive from the State is unreliable. The State cannot report to us both a "Mailing Address" and a "Home Address." We only occasionally send paper U.S. mail, but, when we do, it's important, and includes: Ballots for Union elections, insurance information, and legally-required warnings of Union meetings.

If your mailing address is different from your home address, we need you to tell us! Email nstein@vsea.org. Thanks!

Upcoming Meetings/Events/Holidays:

May 26

Memorial Day Holiday

VSEA Offices and Most State Offices Closed

May 27

Supervisory Unit Executive Committee Meeting

VSEA HQ

Montpelier

9:00 a.m.

May 28

Steward Training: Your Bargaining Unit's Contract (Corrections)

Room 1507

100 Main St.

Newport

May 29

Barre Chapter Meeting

The Quarry Restaurant

Barre

5:00 p.m.

May 30

Steward Training: Solidarity, Power and State Policies Williston Fire Station

Room 1507

100 Main St.

Newport