



WEEK IN ACTION!

Weekly News From Your Union ~ December 8, 2014 – December 12, 2014

Budget Crisis Resurrects Unfortunate Rhetoric About State Employees Not Doing Enough To Help

It's no secret that a primary focus of lawmakers in the upcoming 2015 legislative session will be to identify ways to reduce Vermont's ongoing and ballooning budget deficit. Unfortunately, given the State's firm stance to date against finding new revenue sources, VSEA and state employees are concerned that lawmakers will again rely heavily on service and position cuts to balance the budget.

Already, some State officials and lawmakers are publicly intimating that state employees are not "stepping up to the plate" or "doing enough" to help Vermont stabilize its huge budget deficit. But VSEA President Shelley Martin reminded *WIA* of what VSEA members have already done just this year to help Vermont save money.

"I get upset when I hear some people continue to say that state employees are not doing enough right now to help," Martin said. "Just this year, our retirees agreed to change their prescription drug program to save the state money. State employees also agreed this year to switch to Blue Cross from Cigna because officials told us it would save the state \$10 million annually. These actions are in addition to ones VSEA members have taken in just the past few years, including a 3% wage cut, a wage freeze, furlough days, step freezes, RIFs, and the cost-saving tweaks we agreed to allow the State to make to our pensions and health care. State employees have been—and are—doing our part, and I urge VSEA members to join me in calling out the officials and lawmakers who continue to perpetuate the myth that we're not." Martin added that state employees also recently learned that they would be paying 18 percent more for health care premiums, which is, in effect, is a pay cut. "Again, VSEA warned the State to not offer all the premium holidays and instead bank extra funds, but they wouldn't listen so now, instead of maybe an 8 or 9 percent increase, we are looking at an 18 percent jump."

As a reminder about the State's pledge to save \$10 million annually by switching state employees from Cigna to Blue Cross, here is an excerpt from a State press release, dated August 21, 2013:

MONTPELIER – [The State] announced today that [it] has completed a competitive bidding process for health care administration, pharmacy, and dental benefits that will save more than \$10 million per year. Vermont has awarded the contract for administering the State employee medical plan to Blue Cross Blue Shield of Vermont (BCBS). The State also selected its current providers, Express Scripts and Northeast Delta Dental, to contract for its pharmacy and dental coverage. The more than \$10 million in annual savings results from the combined savings achieved for all services in the bidding process.

"[We are] pleased that these contracts will save taxpayers more than \$10 million annually and that Vermont will be partnering with BCBS of Vermont to help improve the health and well-

being of State employees and their families,” the [State] said. “This is a good deal for the employees, as well as the taxpayers.”

Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders Sends Pro-Union, Pro-VSEA Video Message To United Staff Members

Prior to voting for union representation next week on December 16 and 17, Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders sent a video message to the approximately 800 United Staff members at UVM who will be deciding whether or not to join the VSEA.

Here is what Sanders told United Staff members:

“Hi. This is Senator Bernie Sanders. I understand that over 700 UVM staff members will have the opportunity soon to vote on whether or not to have a union. It is not my intention to tell you how to vote in that election. That is your decision. What I will tell you, however, is that I have had the opportunity of working with thousands of Vermont workers who are members of unions, including many who work in the field of education. These include the full-time and adjunct faculty at UVM and the Vermont State Colleges and in public schools, among others. These workers formed their unions to improve the conditions of their employment. Forming a union means you and your co-workers will have the opportunity to sit down as legal equals with management to negotiate a legally binding contract covering all aspects of your wages, benefits and working conditions. I have worked with Vermont State Employees’ Union, the VSEA, for many years and can attest to their professionalism and commitment to the rights of working people. They’re a good union. Nationally, unionized workers earn wages that are, on average, 28% more than non-union workers, with significantly better benefits and working conditions. Having a union ends the arrangement where the employer makes all the decisions unilaterally and institutes a legal process where your union organization collectively bargains with the employer regarding the issues you have identified as needing improvement. I wish you the very best in your efforts to create a democratic process workplace where your voice can really be heard.”

Bob Stone Appointed To Board Of Trustees!

The VSEA Board of Trustees met this week and appointed longtime VSEA activist Bob Stone to fill the Non-Management Unit (NMU) seat recently vacated by John Howe.

Stone currently serves as the Chairperson of VSEA’s NMU, leading the Unit’s Bargaining Team and Executive Committee. He has also served on the Board of Trustees, as the Trustee representing District 4.

Congratulations Bob!

VSEA Members Working At Vermont Veterans' Home Urged To Attend December 17 Board Meeting

VSEA members working at the Vermont Veterans' Home are urged to attend all or part of next week's VVH Board meeting on Wednesday, December 17. The meeting begins at 12:30 in the facility's Luke Crispe Room.

This is the first VVH Board meeting since the release of a report that recommends cutting staff positions to save money; a move frontline VVH workers will caution the Board is ill advised.

VVH workers will also be reminding Board members about their platform for positive change, which includes:

- Frontline VVH workers strongly support making a permanent General Fund commitment to the long-term care of our Vermont veterans;
- Frontline VVH workers strongly support the state investing resources in a professional marketing plan for VVH;
- Frontline VVH workers oppose a reduction in the number of licensed beds at our facility;
- Frontline VVH workers oppose a reduction in the number of frontline, direct-care providers; and
- Frontline VVH workers oppose further harm to southern Vermont's economy by cutting services and jobs.

At the meeting, workers will be wearing stickers that read "Value Our Veterans. Value Our Service."

Commentary Questions State's Commitment To VVH

A commentary on VTDigger today by Arlington, Vt., resident Don Keelan included this passage:

"The home in recent years has seen its daily census fall below capacity — for a host of reasons.

The administration noted this and made the suggestion that the home's certified beds be reduced when in fact it should be just the opposite — they should be doubled.

What has been missing for decades within the operation of this 130-year-old state-operated facility is an absence of promotion — statewide and regionally. The current census at the home places 72 percent of the residents coming from south of Rutland/Windsor. The bulk of the state's population resides north of these counties. The home has had no funds in its budget to promote its services. Any wonder that veterans residing upstate would not even know about the home?"

Read the full commentary here: <http://bit.ly/1qEgUVq>

VSEA President Hosting Coffee & Donuts For HAEU Workers

On Friday, December 19, VSEA President Shelley Martin will be at the Health Access Eligibility Unit (HAEU) office in Essex Junction to personally meet with workers there and bring them some coffee and donuts. Her visit coincides with a HAEU L/M subcommittee meeting to discuss a host of issues confronting the workforce as they deal with a mountain of Green Mountain Care applications that must be processed.

Martin tells *WIA*, “VSEA members are continuing to work collaboratively with ESD and HAEU management to solve some of the issues. The coffee and donuts are a small token of VSEA’s appreciation for the important and time-sensitive service these workers’ deliver daily”.

Important Meeting For VSEA Members At Southern State

VSEA members working at the Southern State Correctional Facility in Springfield are urged to attend two important meetings on Thursday, December 18. Beginning at 1:00 p.m. in the conference room, VSEA Field Representative Bob South is meeting with members to prep for a 1:30 p.m. meeting with frontline workers and local lawmakers and state officials. For more information, please contact Bob by email at bsouth@vsea.org or by phone at 802-793-6411.

VSEA Medicare-Eligible Retirees Reminded To Look For New Prescription Benefit Card

WIA was asked to remind VSEA’s Medicare-eligible retirees that you will soon receive a new prescription benefit card in the mail from Express Scripts. The new program and card become effective January 1, 2015. Your new drug card will be enclosed in a large package, and it will replace your old prescription card.

Dec. 17 Event For Striking FairPoint Workers In Central Vermont

VSEA is urging members in central Vermont to attend a “Have a Drink to Support Fairness at FairPoint” event being held Wednesday, December 17, at the Three Penny Taproom in Montpelier. The fundraiser begins at 5:00 p.m. and goes until 8:00 p.m.

Three Penny is donating 10% of the establishment’s bar profits from all of Wednesday, December 17, to the FairPoint workers’ strike fund. Worker representatives will be at Three Penny from 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. to bring people up to speed on the strike and personally take donations.

If you can’t make the event next week, there are still more ways to help striking workers and their families:

- A special CWA Local 1400 wish list on amazon.com has been established, and VSEA members statewide are urged to help the children of striking workers have presents under the tree this holiday season. The wish list has toys and other items costing less than \$25.
- Make a donation and to learn more about why FairPoint workers are on strike by visiting fairnessatfairpoint.com.

Vermont Solidarity Group Pens Letter Soliciting Donations & Announcing Event

The Vermont Labor Solidarity Community Action Group asked WIA to include the following letter it is mailing to supporters:

Dear Community Member,

The Vermont Worker's Center and Vermont Labor Solidarity Group are requesting your donations to support community members in need!

As you may know, FairPoint Workers are entering their third month on strike against the unfair demands of FairPoint management. These 1,700 principled workers have offered FairPoint management \$200 million dollars in concessions as part of their effort to keep New England's rural communities served by landline telecommunications service. The company has refused to budge from demands of over \$700 million dollars of concessions. This would make now meaningful middle-class jobs, low-paying jobs with no pensions or other real benefits.

We believe this is outrageous and are asking you on behalf of these striking workers to contribute during this Holiday season to help these workers make ends meet.

We are holding a "Holidarity Dinner" on December 21st at the Sustainability Academy (Barnes School) to show our support for these courageous workers fighting for everyone's rights. We are asking you and other community members to show your support in several ways:

- Attend the dinner and show your support for these brave workers standing strong in the cold, ice and snow!
- Donate a gift certificate, gift card or merchandise to be raffled off as part of fundraising activities. This would of course be mentioned in the dinner's program/menu.
- Make a direct donation to the IBEW (International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers) CWA (Communications Workers of America) strike fund <http://fairnessatfairpoint.com/ibew-cwa-strike-relief-fund/>
- Prominently display a poster to publicize the event.

We are acting independently of the above Unions simply as concerned community members. This action is not endorsed nor should it be construed to be an action taken by the above Unions. This dinner and all solicitations are independently taken by the Vermont Workers Center and the Vermont Labor Solidarity Group to support our fellow community members during a very trying time!

Thank you for your support and we wish you and yours a joyous season!

VSEA Advantage Program Participant Offering Deal To New Members

The Fusion Yoga Studio in Montpelier is offering a \$30 for 30 days discount to new members who sign up for yoga sessions. For more information, contact:

Fusion Yoga Studio
75 Main Street
Montpelier
Ground floor, rear entrance (behind Boutique No. 9)
Phone: 802-272-8923
General Questions Email: Yoga@FusionStudio.org
Membership Sign Up Email: Yogainfo@FusionStudio.org

NLRB Rules That Work Email Can Be Used For Union Organizing Purposes

From the December 12 New York Times:

“In a decision that could affect millions of workers across the country, the National Labor Relations Board ruled on Thursday that employers could not prohibit employees from using their company’s email to communicate and engage in union organizing on their own time.

The 3-to-2 ruling overturned a decision made in 2007, when Republicans held a majority on the Board, that had forbidden such use of email.

Calling that ruling ‘clearly incorrect,’ the current majority noted how technology had transformed daily habits. ‘The workplace is ‘uniquely appropriate’ and ‘the natural gathering place’ for such communications,’ the board wrote, ‘and the use of email as a common form of workplace communication has expanded dramatically in recent years.’”

Read the entire story here: <http://nyti.ms/1BDHUbp>

VSEA App Now Has Updated Contracts

Just a note that the VSEA’s App has now been updated to include all the new contracts ratified this year by VSEA’s Bargaining Teams. VSEA App users can also find: steward, officer and staff contact information; a calendar of events; and labor news from Vermont and around the globe.

Download the VSEAUnite App for Your Smartphone!

Union Contact Info
Steward Trainings
VSEA Contracts
Calendar and Events
News Feed
and More!

Upcoming Meetings/Events/Holidays:

December 16

Day One: United Staff Vote
Marsh Lounge, Billings
48 University Place

December 16

Council Meeting
Capital Plaza Hotel
Montpelier
9:00 a.m.

December 17

Day Two: United Staff Vote
Marsh Lounge, Billings
48 University Place

December 18

Training: Steward 3: The NMU Contract
VTrans Training Center, 2nd floor
1716 US Rte. 302
Berlin
9:00 a.m.

December 19

Retired Members' Bylaws Subcommittee Meeting
VSEA HQ
Montpelier
11:00 a.m.

December 19

HAEU L/M Subcommittee Meeting
IBM
Essex Junction
9:30 a.m.