



## WEEK IN ACTION!

Weekly News From Your Union ~ February 9, 2014 – February 13, 2015

### **State Attaches Arbitrary 400 Number To Possible Layoffs Coming If Workers Don't Find Millions**

The *Associated Press* and the *Times Argus* both published stories today, featuring Secretary of the Administration Justin Johnson playing hardball and threatening to RIF 400 hard-working state employees if VSEA doesn't agree to some kind of concessions to produce millions of dollars to help shrink Vermont's budget deficit.

“Worst case, you're looking at probably 400, and perhaps even a little more,” Johnson says. “There's not a set number, certainly, in my mind. But it could, depending on what plays out, whether we get any concessions, be between 100 and 400.”

VSEA Executive Director Steve Howard responds to Johnson's saber rattling in the story, saying, “I think those numbers are, first of all, very disturbing. It's disturbing for the people who will lose their jobs. It's bad news for Vermonters who will have a hard time getting the services they need from state government. It's also counterproductive.” He adds, “It's hard for us to say to our members that we're going to entertain taking money out of your paycheck while you're already struggling...when we've got a political establishment that seems hell-bent on protecting the wealthiest Vermonters.”

VSEA President Shelley Martin reminds that state workers have given a lot in recent years. More than 600 workers were laid off during the Douglas administration, she explains. Additionally, employees did not receive raises or “step increases.”

For now, this appears to be posturing rhetoric by the State, but VSEA members are urged, once again, sadly, to begin calling and emailing your lawmakers and State officials to push back against the mindset that state employees should be ready and willing to help balance Vermont's budget out of your paychecks. Remember, the lawmakers and officials hammering on state employees are the same lawmakers and officials who refuse to ask several ski resort owners (some out of state) to renegotiate their very outdated land leases, which costs Vermont millions annually. [Read about the ski industry's lease deals here.](#)

### **Fired Up After Reading About Potential For 400 Job Cuts? Let Lawmakers And Elected Officials Know At VSEA State House Day On Tuesday, February 17!**

As announced several times recently in *WIA*, VSEA's annual State House Day is Tuesday, February 17, and it's a great place for frontline state employees to meet face to face with their local lawmakers to talk about the service you provide and the challenges confronting you daily. It's also a good time for VSEA members to lobby legislators against more cuts to state services and jobs. This is especially important right now for members working at the Community High School of Vermont, the Vermont Veterans' Home, the Derby and Rutland 911 Dispatch offices and the Judiciary.

Register to attend VSEA's State House Day by [clicking here!](#)

This year's VSEA State House Day features:

- An informal coffee with lawmakers, beginning at 7:30 a.m., right outside the State House cafeteria;

- A noon Town Hall meeting inside House Chambers, providing VSEA members an opportunity to publicly share stories about the service you deliver, the adverse impact of past and currently proposed cuts to services or anything else on your mind; and
- VSEA’s annual Legislative Open House begins at 4:00 p.m. Another great opportunity to meet face-to-face with lawmakers in a casual, relaxed atmosphere.

Member turnout will be key this year, as ongoing budget shortfalls continue to increase the size of the target on additional state services and positions. We must fight back against the mindset to keep cutting public services and jobs, as opposed to finding new revenue to avoid cuts and keep vital state services operating.

Again, please [register here](#) to attend VSEA State House Day on February 17. Thanks!

## **Can’t Attend State House Day? Here’s How You Can Help**

Even if you can’t attend VSEA’s State House Day, you can still help your union brothers and sisters and by calling the State House’s Sergeant at Arms on Tuesday at 802-828-2228 and leaving the following message for your local legislators: “I am a state employee. Raise revenue! No cuts to state services!”

VSEA says thanks in advance for every call made to the State House next Tuesday! Your solidarity is appreciated.

## **Got Questions? Contact Your Elected VSEA Leaders**

As the debate around the State’s budget proposal rages on at the State House, VSEA understands that members might have questions about your union’s position on certain issues, or you might want to learn more about how to support a VSEA campaign at your worksite. To help facilitate the conversation, VSEA is pleased to share the following VSEA leaders contact information links with members. They are:

[VSEA Board of Trustees Members](#)

[VSEA Bargaining Unit Teams](#)

[VSEA Council Members](#)

[Chapter Presidents](#)

## **VSEA Public Petition Campaign Prompts Misleading Memo From State**

In an effort to demonstrate and build support for VSEA’s “Fight Back” campaign to stop the proposed cuts to state services and jobs, your union began circulating a public petition a few weeks ago that reads:

*“We are Vermont State Employees and Staff at the Vermont State Colleges. We are the frontline experts in our fields, providing essential services to Vermonters and ensuring they are delivered in safe, efficient and effective ways.*

*We are united, and we are calling on Vermont lawmakers to join us in seeking alternatives to cutting the vital public services that we all rely on every day. We also ask that you respect our collective bargaining agreements, the terms and conditions of which are mutually negotiated and agreed to by state employees and the State.*

*In addition, we, as dedicated State employees, stepped up during Vermont’s recession, and in previous budget crises, to help balance the state budget. Since that time, continued ill-advised budget cuts have resulted in underfunded and understaffed programs, the negative effects of which our communities continue to experience to this day.*

*Therefore we call on you to be smart, collaborative, and courageous in this moment, incorporating input from state employees and exploring other options to solve Vermont’s FY2016 deficit, especially finding*

*Cutting state programs, or reducing their capacity, is not a real solution for Vermonters.*

*State employees stand united in calling for **NO CUTS TO STATE SERVICES.***

*Vermont can and must do better.”*

As VSEA members probably know, organizers and members have been collecting petition signatures at worksites across Vermont, and, according to a Feb. 11 *Times Argus* story, they crossed paths with the Secretary of the Administration at some point, and he was approached to sign the petition. The story doesn't mention if he signed or not, but the solicitation did cause him to later pen a memo to State Commissioners and Secretaries, informing them that he was “both surprised and disappointed to be approached with a VSEA ‘Fight Back’ petition that calls for no cuts to state government.” Then he adds: “The petition indicated that the union will not deal with the administration on labor savings.” It's this sentence that caught the attention of VSEA Executive Director Steve Howard, who tells *WIA* that the Secretary's memo was inaccurate. “State employees and the VSEA have never said and don't say in the petition referenced in the memo that we are unwilling to continue these discussions,” Howard explains. “VSEA is making a principled stand on behalf of our members and the Vermonters they serve to find a more sustainable and sensible way for Vermont to balance the budget and fix the sluggish economic and revenue growth we have been experiencing. We do not in this petition say we are adverse to any discussions with the State.”

*VT Digger* followed up on the *Argus* piece in a February 12 story, and VSEA's Howard again stresses VSEA's position on the State's mandate for workers to somehow find \$5 million to \$11 million in savings.

“The choice the Legislature and the [State] have is do we want to take money out of the pockets of snow plow drivers and nursing assistants, or do we want to have some courage and ask the people who stood to gain over the last decade to pay more in order to provide the level service for Vermonters they deserve.”

Howard reiterates that VSEA is willing to meet with the State, but he reminds that “our position is firm,” adding, “State employees have given and given, and it's time for folks with more resources to step up to the plate.”

## **VSEA President And Executive Director Send Letter To State Asking It Not To Implement Consolidation Of 911 Dispatch Centers Before Legislative Review**

***VSEA issued this press release on February 11 about its letter:***

VSEA President Shelley Martin and Executive Director Steve Howard co-signed a letter to the State that is being delivered today. It calls on the State to honor the legislative process and allow lawmakers to complete their work on the FY2016 budget before implementing any plan to close Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs, or 911 Emergency Dispatch Offices) in Derby and Rutland and transfer all 911 emergency calls to Vermont's two remaining PSAPs in Williston and Rockingham.

“Please respect the legislative process—and the Vermonters legislators represent—and allow [lawmakers] to give your [PSAP consolidation] proposal a full and complete review before [the State] takes any action to implement the proposal,” reads the VSEA letter. “Rushing a decision through could put the public safety of Vermonters in jeopardy.”

“VSEA's frontline 911 emergency dispatchers are hearing through different channels that that the PSAP consolidation could begin as soon as March, and they asked their union to step in and help them ensure proper legislative review of the consolidation proposal before it happens...if it happens,” explains Martin. “The letter also asks [the State] to rethink its PSAP consolidation proposal and instead work with lawmakers to find alternative sources of revenue that might prevent this cut and cuts to the Vets’

Home and to the Community High School of Vermont. We continue to urge the [State] to have the political will to stop the cuts by identifying new revenue sources.”

VSEA’s letter also informs the State that the union is “pleased” the House and Senate Government Operations Committees recently agreed to sponsor a public hearing on the PSAP consolidation proposal.

“This public hearing will allow lawmakers to hear directly from the growing number of public safety officials and regular Vermonters voicing opposition to this PSAP consolidation proposal,” says Martin. “VSEA hopes the hearing will convince lawmakers that the State’s PSAP proposal is ill advised and could be detrimental to public safety.”

## **Public Opposition Grows To Cutting 911 Dispatch Centers**

On Sunday night, February 9, nearly 100 firefighters, EMS personnel and police officers showed up to a public forum at the Rutland Fire Station; most to voice opposition to the State’s proposal to save money by closing two of Vermont’s four existing Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs). The Centers to be shuttered are in Rutland and Derby; two areas that have already taken their share of economic hits.

“Don’t give up,” Rep. Charles “Butch” Shaw, R-Pittsford, told the assembled crowd. “It may seem like a lost cause today, but don’t give up. Keep up the public pressure by calling the governor’s office and calling the commissioner (of public safety).”

Representing VSEA at the forum was lobbyist Vince Illuzzi who spoke to the *Herald* about the State’s proposal, informing the reporter that:

- Under the plan to merge the four state emergency call centers, a portion of the dispatchers from Derby would be moved to Williston along with the more than 20,000 911 calls and 20,000 non-emergency calls that the Derby center handles annually. Illuzzi responds, “Our question is, ‘How do you solve an overtime problem by firing people? It makes no sense.’” He adds that, in Rutland, where 38,000 emergency calls and 29,000 non-emergency calls were handled last year, an unknown number of the dispatchers would be moved under the State’s plan to Rockingham, where 26,000 emergency and 22,000 non-emergency calls were received last year; and
- With fewer dispatchers and an estimated increase of 7,000 emergency calls annually, the size of Vermont’s dispatch centers should be increasing, not decreasing.

Illuzzi finishes by telling the reporter, “This is, in our judgment, a plain crazy idea,” and he tells *WIA* that a majority of the people in the room told him they agree.

## **2013 Study Shows PSAPs At Capacity**

Another point Illuzzi is making when talking with State Officials and lawmakers is that a 2013 report prepared for the legislature found that Vermont’s current dispatching system is operating at capacity and cannot handle more calls. It also determined that Vermont’s 911 Dispatch Centers couldn’t take on additional dispatching duties for other agencies.

VSP Capt. Donald Patch writes in the 2013 report, “With the current level of dispatching and E-911 call-taking duties, the state police cannot handle a significant increase in dispatching duties with the current staff, equipment and infrastructure.”

Iluzzi adds that the situation hasn’t gotten any better in past 15 months.

## **VSEA Launches New Keep 911 Dispatchers Local Ads On *VTDigger***

This week, VSEA began running new ads on the online media site *VT Digger*, opposing the State's 911-Emergency Center consolidation proposal. The ads feature a mock conversation between a 911 Dispatcher in Williston and a Vermonter in distress in Derby, which will be the case if the consolidation is allowed to move forward. It urges Vermonters to "Keep 911 Dispatchers Local!" and it invites visitors to the page to call the State, sign a petition and learn more about the Dispatchers fight.

To view VSEA's new *Digger* 911 ad page, [click here](#).

## **Town Of Chittenden Select Board Issues Proclamation Supporting 911 Dispatchers**

***Note: This proclamation was signed on Feb. 9 by the Town of Chittenden Select Board:***

WHEREAS, [the State] has proposed the closure of the Rutland Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP, also known as State Police Dispatch) and relocation of services to Rockingham and then to Westminster, combined with the relocation of the Derby PSAP to save approx. \$1.7 million in [its] 2016 Fiscal Year budget;

WHEREAS, the Rutland PSAP provides emergency dispatch services for the Town of Chittenden fire department, first response, and state police;

WHEREAS, the Town of Chittenden is the largest town in the State of Vermont geographically-with the Green Mountain National Forest making up 67% of the land mass and with a state identified high hazard hydroelectric dam that in a catastrophic failure would cause severe flooding south through at least five towns;

WHEREAS, the Town of Chittenden is home to many recreational activities including hunting, fishing, hiking, snowmobiling, XC skiing etc. that often occur in remote areas of town;

WHEREAS, the dispatchers at the Rutland PSAP are very familiar with local landmarks, snow mobile trails, VAST trails and other locations based on many years of combined experience;

WHEREAS, the Town of Chittenden would not be served in the same capacity with dispatchers who have not lived and worked in the local area for many years;

WHEREAS, the loss of this institutional knowledge would cause significant delays in the rapid dispatch of our local emergency services,

WHEREAS, the potential for delays to result in more significant harm to our residents and visitors and the loss from potential property damage;

WHEREAS, the town of Chittenden cannot abide with the safety risk involved with the proposed plan or with the loss of valuable jobs and the experienced people who perform these jobs in the most stressful of all situations;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Town of Chittenden Select Board is opposed to [the State]'s PSAP consolidation plan and requests that the Rutland PSAP remains in its current capacity.

## **Community High School Of Vermont Worker Voices Dominate Public Budget Forum!**

The number of Community High School of Vermont educators and supporters who testified on Monday night in opposition to the State's proposed deep cut to the program did not go unnoticed.

In a February 10 story about the proposed CHSVT cut, *VT Digger* writes "Concern about the cuts to the CHSVT stood out a joint House and Senate Appropriations Committee public hearing. The cuts to the CHSVT emerged as a recurring theme, drawing testimony from a wide range of Vermonters—from a faith-based organization in Chittenden County to a teacher with the school in Lyndonville." That teacher, VSEA member Sean Dobbin, testified on Monday that "I'm not kidding when I say I would send my own children to this school." He went on to say that the State's cuts would "essentially destroy the school as we know it," adding, "The common practice in many places for this sort of work is sort of a 'Who cares, throw a workbook at them' approach, or a 'hey let's see how many diplomas we can churn out' approach' ...What I see here is a nationally-recognized, progressive, rich curriculum."

*Digger* reports that testimony against cutting the CHSVT's budget, like that of Dobbins, caught the attention of lawmaker Sen. Alice Nitka, who tells *Digger*, "You can see from the commitment of teachers what they do to get to these people."

In a hearing earlier in the day on the CHSVT cut, Rep. Joan Lenes reminded DOC Commissioner Andy Pallito that it is the State's job "to help with recidivism," which the CHSVT has been proven to do.

### **CHSVT Board Pens Commentary**

*Note: This commentary appeared on VT Digger on February 11:*

#### **Cutting prison education is shortsighted**

The Community High School of Vermont (CHSVT) is the fully licensed and accredited high school and vocational training and certification program for inmates in Vermont's corrections system. For many students, it is the only opportunity they will have to acquire the academic, social and technical skills they need to get a job — and to be able to contribute to our state in a positive way — when they re-enter the community.

The [State] was no doubt searching for budget cuts that impact the fewest Vermonters. That makes educational programs for inmates an inviting target. After all, who wants to defend convicts over legitimate budgetary demands of other, more influential and less controversial constituencies?

We do.

Here is why: The economic and social value of CHSVT and its programs is significant. The money you invest in it as a taxpayer produces a meaningful and measurable return.

The school has about 650 students – 504 enrolled students, plus an additional 150 students participating in workshops, seminars and internships. Last year, students earned 332 trade certificates and more than three dozen students completed high school. CHSVT also provides remedial services for inmates who graduated from the public high school system, but who still have startling academic needs in core areas like reading, writing and mathematics.

Every Vermonter understands that there's no better anti-poverty, anti-drug and anti-crime tool than a good education.

Vermont's prison education and training programs are one of the most effective tools the state has for preventing repeat offenders. In fact, a 2014 study by the Rand Corp. (How Effective is Corrections Education and Where Do We Go from Here) analyzed 30 years of research about corrections education programs and noted, "on average, every dollar spent on prison education programs results in a savings of four to five dollars in the cost of re-incarcerating prisoners ... due to lower recidivism rates." In other words, those who participate in these programs are much less likely to return to prison.

Instead of returning to jail, CHSVT students return to their communities with the social and technical skills to move forward. Through employment they generate tax revenue that helps to reimburse us for the cost of their incarceration and invest in other services. Most importantly, these students are able to care for themselves and their families (they frequently have children) in a way that helps to break the multi-generational cycles of poverty and crime. This is why a corps of retired teachers founded the school. And every Vermonter understands that there's no better anti-poverty, anti-drug and anti-crime tool than a good education.

The administrators and faculty continuously enhance the school's efficiency and productivity. Over the last several years CHSVT has reduced spending by more than \$1 million, while sustaining its results. Nevertheless, CHSVT has shouldered a lopsided share of budget cuts required throughout state government, in fiscal years when overall state spending increased about 5 percent each year.

The governor's proposal guarantees that more inmates are returned to our communities without the skills they need to get their lives – and the lives of their children – on a stable and successful path. The Legislature should not support this debilitating cut.

The benefits of CHSVT to you as a taxpayer – both financially and socially – far outweigh the costs. Please encourage your legislator to support adequate funding for this important school.

## **Deadline Approaching To Submit Bylaw Changes**

The deadline to submit proposals for changes to VSEA's Master Bylaws is Friday, March 6, 2015. Proposals must be mailed to: Janis Henderson, Bylaws Committee Chair, c/o VSEA Headquarters, P.O. Box 518, Montpelier, VT 05601-0518.

Proposals should reference the number, section, sub-section, etc. of the bylaw you would like to change. You should also include the language you want to add, delete or substitute. Also include the reason(s) you are making this proposal. Example: "Bylaw 0 A (1) (b) Change: Monday to Sunday. Reason: Makes it easier to work with the calendar."

Please be sure the changes you are recommending include all Articles and/or Bylaws that may be affected by the proposed change.

If you have questions, please contact Janis at [jhenderson@vsea.org](mailto:jhenderson@vsea.org).

## **Disturbing: Commentary Alleges That Vermonter With TBI Was Ostracized For Referencing VSEA Member John Howe In Application For Assistance**

*This commentary by Burlington resident Nancy Welch, an English professor at the University of Vermont, appeared this week on VTDigger.*

For some time now I have been asking my husband if he feels ready to seek work. It's a difficult question for him — not only because of the economy and his age but because eight brain surgeries since 2005 have taken their toll. He carries in his wallet a note to explain, should a police officer stop him as he weaves down a sidewalk, that he is not drunk but brain injured. His smart phone substitutes for his wiped-out working memory, reminding him to shave and brush his teeth. The holder of a Ph.D. in communications, he now struggles to find his words. All this and more has swayed him to stick close to home, to rely on me to bring him news of the wider world.

So when he recently replied that yes, he would like to learn if there are employment options for him, I sang *hallelujah* and contacted a good friend who until recently worked for the state Department of Human Services division of Vocational Rehabilitation. On a snowy Monday I brought my husband to a Voc Rehab orientation where he learned about their services, filled out an initial form, and requested — and was given — an appointment with the counselor that both our friend and my husband's brain injury support group recommended. The next day he received a letter from that counselor with a few more forms to bring to their first meeting. "I'm looking forward to finding out what they might have for me," my husband told me. "Maybe I *can* work in office." *Hallelujah*, indeed!

What a blow, then, when we returned that evening from my husband's monthly brain injury support group meeting to find a phone message from Voc Rehab: They had canceled his appointment. He would not be permitted to meet with this counselor. In fact, he would not be permitted to meet with *any* counselor, not from the Burlington office. Why? Because in filling out his orientation form, my husband had made a serious mistake: He responded to the question *Who referred you to Vocational Rehabilitation?* by writing the name of our friend, John Howe.

The message from Voc Rehab was clear: John Howe may not make referrals to our office. John Howe may not make recommendations.

John Howe is the man who first introduced us more 18 years ago, when my husband was still working as a commercial photographer and John Howe, his next-door neighbor, had just started his job as a Voc Rehab counselor. John Howe is also the man who made news headlines last spring when, in apparent retaliation for his whistle-blowing testimony to the state Legislature about financial mismanagement in the Department of Human Services, Voc Rehab put him on leave and initiated an extensive disciplinary investigation against him. “We Are All John Howe” became a rallying cry, appearing on lawn signs across the region and featured at a Statehouse May Day demonstration. It was a rallying cry for everyone concerned that state employees be allowed to speak up, without fear of losing their jobs, when state agencies mishandle public funds and public trust. By early June, John’s name was cleared; by fall, he had won his bid to move to a position with Vermont’s Community High School. When my husband wrote *John Howe* on his orientation form, neither of us dreamed that this would interfere with his ability to receive services.

To be sure, management at Voc Rehab has purview over how clients and counselors are paired. If this particular counselor is overbooked, the appointment we were given made in error, we would understand. But that’s not what has happened here. By refusing to give my husband an appointment with any counselor from the Burlington office, Voc Rehab’s managers have made it dismayingly clear: The retaliation against John Howe continues ... and extends to disabled clients who admit to knowing him. When my husband went to the Voc Rehab orientation, he took an enormous step — a leap of faith about his abilities and about looking beyond his wife for help. What’s happened since is a terrible — a callous and unnecessary — setback. Making phone calls is difficult for my husband, but that’s what I have been asking him to do: Call Voc Rehab again, leave another message, all in the dwindling hope that someone will call back, give him an appointment with a local counselor, extend to him the support that this office receives state funds to provide, and do so before his job-finding resolve evaporates. And just as John Howe went public last winter and spring, in the hopes that his testimony to the Legislature and his struggle against retaliation would bring change to the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, I am going public too: We are all *still* John Howe and the problems in this state office, problems that risk the well-being of the disabled clients it purports to serve, remain unresolved.

*Note: If this sad story upsets you, please consider posting a comment to the commentary, which can be found by [clicking here](#).*

## **Retirees’ Chapter Raffle Winner!**

VSEA Retirees’ Chapter leaders Joanie Maclay and Susan Martin (pictured here) were at VSEA HQ on February 12 to choose the winner of a raffle the Chapter recently conducted to raise funds.

The winner is John St. Arnauld, a 35-year state employee who last worked for Forests and Parks as a Forestry Specialist III. He retired in 2004 and now resides in Virginia. Arnauld will receive \$135.

Congratulations John!

## **NMU Bargaining Team’s Survey Now Live!**

VSEA’s Non-Management Unit Bargaining Team sent a letter and survey link to NMU members last week. The survey seeks to assess NMU members’ bargaining priorities before entering into formal negotiations this fall with the State. The NMU’s 46-question survey is comprehensive, covering everything from wages to benefits to working conditions.

NMU Chair Bob Stone is stressing the importance of the survey and is urging as many NMU members as possible to fill it out and send it in.

NMU members can [link to the survey here](#). The Team is requesting that surveys be completed by April 15, 2015.

## **VSEA Insurance Representative Schedules Upcoming Worksite Meetings**



VSEA Insurance Representative Joanne Woodcock has scheduled two worksite meetings for next week. They are:

Castleton State College  
Calvin Coolidge Library  
Wednesday, February 18  
9:00 a.m. to Noon  
Asa Bloomer Building  
88 Merchants Row  
First Floor Atrium Area  
Thursday, February 19  
Friday, February 20  
Noon to 3:00 p.m.

Receive information on disability coverage, family life insurance, family accident and cancer coverage. You must be a member paying full dues to be eligible for this VSEA benefit. If you are an agency-fee payer, Joanne can provide you information about signing up for full membership.

### **[Seven Days Article Highlights Temps Working For State Without Health Care Insurance](#)**

Temporary employees working for the State's Health Access Eligibility Unit (HAEU) are featured in a February 11 story in Seven Days titled "[For Many Temps In State Jobs, Health Insurance Is Not An Option.](#)" Here's an excerpt:

"Vermont employs about 8,600 full-time workers. More than 2,000 additional people work for Vermont in temporary positions without benefits. State officials used temporary workers to fill critical customer service jobs for Vermont Health Connect, which launched in October 2013. But because the state doesn't extend benefits to temps, those workers were not offered coverage."

### **[VSEA Awards & Scholarship Webpage Updated](#)**

VSEA has updated its [Awards & Scholarship page](#) to include new 2015 VSEA and VSCSF Scholarship application forms and new 2015 forms to nominate Chapters, members and staff for various VSEA awards handed out each year in September at your union's Annual Meeting.

### **[VSEA Members Rightly Question Blue Cross/Blue Shield Decisions On Certain Medical Devices](#)**

One issue that has come up since the State switched employees out of Cigna into Blue Cross/Blue Shield (BC/BS) in 2014 are disputes around certain medical devices BC/BS will or won't cover and the cost associated with some of the devices.

VSEA's Benefits Advisory Committee (BAC) recently learned about one such incident, where BC/BS refused to allow a member to purchase a \$200 foam wedge, prescribed for the member by UVM sleep specialist. BC/BS reported it did not have a code for the wedge, but, instead, they told the member to purchase a \$2000 CPAP machine, and BC/BS would cover ongoing maintenance, mask, hose and filter costs.

To their credit, the member called VSEA to ask why BC/BS would not cover the low-cost solution to his problem, especially a solution prescribed by the member's doctor.

“It took some time and repeated phone calls to BC/BS, but they finally agreed to let this state employee get the foam wedge, saving Vermont taxpayers a bundle of money,” VSEA Benefits Advisory Committee Chair Dave Bellini tells *WIA*.

Bellini adds that these are the kinds of cases your BAC needs to hear about, so if you’re a member who has also been subjected to similar Blue Cross price inflating, please let the BAC know the specifics and the resolution, if any. Your name and other specific details will be kept confidential.

To share your BC/BS story with your union’s Benefits Advisory Committee, please send a brief overview of what happened to you to [vsea@vsea.org](mailto:vsea@vsea.org), subject line heading “BC/BS Issue.” VSEA will confidentially forward your stories to Committee members.

## **State Employee Wellness Program Kicks Off 2015 Incentive Campaign**

*WIA* is pleased to share this information about the 2015 LiveWell Vermont State Employees’ Wellness Program. The program’s 2015 incentive campaign “One Life, Live it Well,” encourages employees to complete the following wellness initiatives:

- Filling out a 2015 online personal health assessment, via the “LiveWell Vermont” portal: \$50/50 points;
- Completing one of four wellness challenges,” which are administered by “LiveWell Vermont” staff during the 2015 incentive year: \$25/25 points;
- Finishing one workshop, via the portal, by November 1, 2015: \$25/25 points; and as a bonus
- Having an annual physical exam conducted between November 1, 2014, and November 1, 2015: \$50/50 points.

Completing these wellness initiatives qualifies active, permanent state employees covered under Blue Cross/Blue Shield for cash incentives up to \$150. Non-plan employees can earn points and qualify for wellness drawings, which are held on a quarterly basis and during challenges.

### 2015 Challenge Number One – New Year, New You!

Time period: January 19, 2015 – March 1, 2015

Join this six-week weight loss challenge to kick-start your 2015 wellness plan! Create a team or participate solo.

## **Upcoming Meetings/Events/Holidays:**

### **February 17**

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

### **February 17**

VSEA State House Day  
State House  
Montpelier  
8:00 a.m. – Breakfast  
Noon – Town Hall Meeting  
4:00 p.m. – Legislative Reception

### **February 18**

Meet w/VSEA Insurance Rep. Joanne Woodcock  
Castleton State College  
Calvin Coolidge Library  
9:00 a.m. to Noon

**February 19**

Meet w/VSEA Insurance Rep. Joanne Woodcock  
Asa Bloomer Building  
88 Merchants Row  
First Floor Atrium Area  
Noon to 3:00 p.m.

**February 20**

Budget Committee Meeting  
VSEA HQ  
Montpelier  
9:00 a.m.

**February 20**

Meet w/VSEA Insurance Rep. Joanne Woodcock  
Asa Bloomer Building  
88 Merchants Row  
First Floor Atrium Area  
Noon to 3:00 p.m.