



WEEK IN ACTION!

Weekly News From Your Union ~ February 16, 2014 – February 20, 2015

Save State Services! Stop The Cuts! Sign VSEA's *Online* Petition TODAY!

If you and your co-workers haven't yet signed VSEA's paper petition asking lawmakers to stop the cuts to state services and, instead, seek new revenue sources, here's your chance to help by [clicking here to sign VSEA's online petition](#). Please also urge your co-workers, family and friends who did not sign a paper petition to sign the online petition. The more signatures we collect, the better.

Thanks in advance for the help!

More Than 100 Members Attend VSEA's 2015 State House Day

More than 100 VSEA members came to the State House on February 17 to lobby lawmakers to reject the State's proposed service and job cuts and instead identify new revenue sources to ensure the continuation of quality public services like those being delivered daily to Vermonters by 911 Emergency Dispatchers, Community High School of Vermont (CHSVT) educators, Vets' Home caregivers and Judiciary and State Colleges' workers.

"Due to an illness, I was unfortunately not able to be at the State House on Tuesday, but I was receiving periodic updates throughout the day, and I am so very thankful to all the VSEA members who took the time to attend and make your voice heard," VSEA President Shelley Martin tells *WIA*. "I know that we had a presence and that we made an impact because I've heard that from several lawmakers and others who were in the building on Tuesday. Again, I really want to thank the hundred-plus members who showed up on your own time to participate. I urge you now to educate your co-workers who could not attend about the importance of face-to-face lobbying and how they can help VSEA moving forward. Most important, that means helping VSEA promote the idea to find new revenue and arguing against more service and job cuts."

VSEA's State House Day started just outside the building's cafeteria at 8:00 a.m., where VSEA hosted coffee for lawmakers and members. The coffee quickly grew into a much larger event, when it was announced that the State's top official would be dropping by to spend a few minutes with a group of VSEA 911 Dispatchers and a group of CHSVT educators. Once the official arrived, he spent a few minutes with each of the groups, allowing one or two members to brief him on why they were at the State House and inform him personally about their issues with his proposed budget plan. Speaking for the Dispatchers were Melissa Sharkis and Tom Lague, and they talked primarily about public safety concerns, proper training and how important it is to retain local knowledge and resources. They also reminded him about the widespread support Dispatchers are receiving from first responders across Vermont. Bill Storz then spoke for the CHSVT educators, and he stressed how important the program is to reducing recidivism and to returning Vermont offenders to their communities as productive members of society. He also reminded that for every \$1 Vermont invests in educating offenders; there is a \$4 to \$5 return. Sadly, the State's top official offered no reply or rebuttal to either group, choosing instead to thank the workers for their input and walk away towards a waiting press gaggle, where he reiterated his desire for state employees to make concessions and his commitment to move forward with his proposed cuts.

At 10:00 a.m., VSEA members were welcomed into House Chambers to hear the reading of a resolution to honor state employees. It read:

Concurrent House Resolution

H.C.R. 41

House concurrent resolution honoring Vermont State Employees for their exemplary public service

Offered by: Representatives Davis of Washington, Bancroft of Westford, Bartholomew of Hartland, Batchelor of Derby, Botzow of Pownal, Branagan of Georgia, Burke of Brattleboro, Buxton of Tunbridge, Carr of Brandon, Chesnut-Tangerman of Middletown Springs, Cole of Burlington, Condon of Colchester, Connor of Fairfield, Copeland-Hanzas of Bradford, Dakin of Chester, Dakin of Colchester, Deen of Westminster, Devereux of Mount Holly, Donahue of Northfield, Donovan of Burlington, Eastman of Orwell, Emmons of Springfield, Evans of Essex, Fields of Bennington, Forguites of Springfield, French of Randolph, Gonzalez of Winooski, Grad of Moretown, Graham of Williamstown, Greshin of Warren, Haas of Rochester, Head of South Burlington, Hebert of Vernon, Higley of Lowell, Hubert of Milton, Jerman of Essex, Jewett of Ripton, Keenan of St. Albans City, Komline of Dorset, Krowinski of Burlington, Lawrence of Lyndon, Lenes of Shelburne, Lewis of Berlin, Lippert of Hinesburg, Long of Newfane, Lucke of Hartford, Macaig of Williston, Manwaring of Wilmington, Marcotte of Coventry, Martin of Wolcott, Masland of Thetford, McCormack of Burlington, McCullough of Williston, McFaun of Barre Town, Miller of Shaftsbury, Morris of Bennington, Mrowicki of Putney, Myers of Essex, Nuovo of Middlebury, O'Brien of Richmond, O'Sullivan of Burlington, Partridge of Windham, Patt of Worcester, Pearson of Burlington, Poirier of Barre City, Pugh of South Burlington, Rachelson of Burlington, Russell of Rutland City, Ryerson of Randolph, Scheuermann of Stowe, Shaw of Pittsford, Sheldon of Middlebury, Smith of New Haven, Stevens of Waterbury, Stuart of Brattleboro, Sullivan of Burlington, Sweaney of Windsor, Tate of Mendon, Townsend of South Burlington, Troiano of Stannard, Viens of Newport City, Woodward of Johnson, Wright of Burlington, and Zagar of Barnard

Whereas, according to the Vermont Department of Human Services Workforce Report for fiscal year 2014, in the executive branch's classified service there are 7,403 full-time and 161 part-time employees, and the comparable numbers for the much smaller exempt category are 580 and 45, respectively, and

Whereas, these 8,189 State employees work in numerous occupations and professions across the State, and

Whereas, Vermont State Employees are employed in fields as diverse as agriculture, computer science, corrections, health care, historic preservation, law enforcement, and transportation, and

Whereas, these outstanding individuals are called upon to report to work in emergency and difficult conditions, including blizzards and tropical storms, and

Whereas, Vermont State Employees serve as the ambassadors of Vermont State government to the world-at-large, and

Whereas, despite instances when they must interact with angry and frustrated individuals, Vermont State Employees always strive to perform their duties in the most professional manner possible, and

Whereas, it is not unusual to hear or read criticism of Vermont State Employees, but praise is often in short supply, and

Whereas, today, February 17, 2015, is State Employees Legislative Day at the State House and offers a wonderful opportunity for the General Assembly to express its appreciation and gratitude for Vermont State Employees' continuing dedication to serving the public, now therefore be it

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives:

That the General Assembly honors Vermont State Employees for their exemplary public service, and be it further

Resolved: That the Secretary of State be directed to send a copy of this resolution to the Vermont State Employees' Association.

Following the reading of the resolution, VSEA members were able to schedule time to meet personally with their local lawmakers, sit in on a legislative committee meeting of their choosing or cross the street to spend some time at the VSEA Council meeting, where the main topic of the day was your union's "Fight Back" campaign and what Council members can do to help.

At noon, VSEA Council members joined those members already at the State House for a Town Hall forum in House Chambers, featuring a panel of frontline VSEA members advocating for their service and against more cuts. To their credit, a couple of dozen lawmakers also attended to hear from frontline state employees. Speaking for 911 Dispatchers were Melissa Sharkis and Patricia Bennett. Speaking for the CHSVT was Mary Poulos. Speaking for the Judiciary was Margaret Crowley. Speaking for the Vets' Home was Melissa Walsh, and speaking for the State Colleges was Janis Henderson. Each took turns explaining why the cut being proposed cut is bad for their Agency/Department, and then each voiced what they were saying to—or would be saying to—lawmakers about their service. After the panel wrapped up, the crowd was addressed by Sen. Anthony Pollina, House Speaker Shap Smith and Senate Pro Tem John Campbell. Pollina fired the crowd up by openly agreeing that state employees have given enough, that job and service cuts are detrimental and hurt the middle class and that finding new revenue sources is essential. Neither Smith or Campbell was willing to be as outspoken as Pollina, choosing instead to remind repeatedly about Vermont's growing budget deficit and the need for all Vermonters to help.

At 4:30 p.m., VSEA members hosted your union's annual Legislative Open House in the Cedar Creek Room of the State House. This popular event allows members to talk with lawmakers in a casual and relaxed environment, although many the conversations this year were more serious due to the State's ongoing threat to cut services and jobs if VSEA members don't return soon to the table to talk. Not surprisingly, lawmakers received an earful from members about how much state employees have already given back and about how it's now time to find new revenue to counter the State's cuts-only mindset.

VSEA's State House Day 2015 received a lot of great press coverage, and here are some links to some of the published stories:

- WCAX: <http://bit.ly/1EMPsH1>
- VPR: <http://bit.ly/17PMgR8>
- VTDigger: <http://bit.ly/1Mx8ffd>, and
- Times Argus: <http://bit.ly/1EnNxsE>

To view photos from VSEA State House Day, please [click here](#).

Former Representative Pens Excellent Commentary, Highlighting The Value Of The Community High School Of Vermont

This commentary was written by former State Representative George Cross of Winooski, a longtime educator and former Superintendent of Schools. It was posted to www.greenmountaindaily.com.

Let's Set The Record Straight.

As the State struggles to meet the challenge of decreased revenue, much has been written about the [State]'s justification for cutting the Community High School of Vermont (CHSVT) budget by half. However, very little has been written about CHSVT's size, the reductions in staff or the improvements in programs over the last several years. Here's that record:

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.

Since 2008 the school has eliminated all 66 adjunct teaching positions. Adjuncts were very part-time positions working between 5 and 15 hours per week and paid between \$15 and \$20 dollars per hour.

Since 2008 the school has reduced its faculty by 9 full-time certified teachers and two of the current positions are frozen and unfilled. It is doubtful these positions will ever be filled. Thus, the school has eliminated 11 teaching positions in the last 7 years. Plus 5 limited-service positions funded via federal funds are questionable in the future.

Since 2008 the school has eliminated the Director of Special Education position and those duties have been assigned to others. In the same period the Superintendent's position has been combined with the Director of Vermont Corrections Industries, which is basically another reduction in the administrative staff of one-half position although the full salary for this combined position is carried in the CHSVT budget.

It is estimated that these reductions in staffing have reduced the school's personnel costs by about \$1.4M per year. That is about a 25 percent reduction in the school's budget!

While all of this was happening other substantive programmatic changes occurred. The school has restructured its learning plans, instructional activities, and language to mirror the DOC's focus on risk reduction and the criminogenic needs of offenders. CHSVT supports case plan compliance for offenders who are identified by the DOC's assessment as in need of a high school diploma and/or career readiness skills to reduce their risk of reoffending. Thus:

- All enrolled students have personalized learning plans that outline their learning goals, areas of need and method of achieving their goals;
- Students are offered two learning tracks - diploma seeking and/or career readiness;
- Graduation requirements were intensified and are now based on measured proficiency;
- All course offerings align with Common Core State Standards. Curriculum, course content and learning activities are proficiency based;
- Enrolled students are assessed for educational progress on a quarterly basis;
- Career and technical courses and workshop offerings have an associated industry certification - school now focuses on connecting offerings to the world of work;
- Restructuring of staff - while teachers were once assigned to specific campuses, they are now assigned to regional teaching teams;
- With the elimination of adjuncts, CHSVT reduced the number of course offerings and concentrated on those content areas that students needed to address their learning goals in their personalized learning plans;

- All teachers are trained in writing, reading and math content and strategies for teaching adult learners;
- Restructure of Administrative support of school - Administrative, Educational Technology, data collection, special education - centrally administered;
- Restructure of Title 1 Services; and
- Implementation of Student Information System in 2013, that has delivered accurate and timely data.

This commitment to continuous improvements that enhance CHSVT's ability to meet the budgetary challenges and its educational obligations is precisely why, according to a recent study by Rand every dollar invested in corrections education can yield a savings of four to five dollars for taxpayers.

Further cuts only ensure more inmates return to our communities unequipped to get their lives back together and stay out of jail.

Please encourage your legislator to support adequate funding for this important school.

[Digger Story Highlights The Great Work Being Done At The CHSVT](#)

Just after *WIA* was sent last week, *VT Digger* [posted a story](#) that, in large part, focuses on the good work being done at the CHSVT to help rehabilitate Vermont offenders and reduce recidivism rates.

The piece begins with the story of Earle Rogers Jr., who, thanks to the CHSVT, completed a welding training program that he tells the reporter has changed his life for the better. Rogers adds “It’s a proven fact that most people who are incarcerated are under-educated. When people can’t find jobs, and are struggling, they often turn to drugs. With education and skills in hand, you have more confidence about yourself, and you can get a good job.”

The story wraps with the voices of several frontline CHSVT educators; all united in their belief that the State’s proposed cut to their service is a big mistake.

“The way I look at it is do we rehabilitate offenders or not?” VSEA member Harmony Harriman tells *Digger*. “When someone comes into the correctional system, they are assessed. Those needs need to be addressed, that is the policy of the DOC. Do we rehabilitate offenders or not?”

[AOT Members...Have You Completed Your Bargaining Survey?](#)

VSEA’s AOT delegate to the NMU Bargaining Team, Art Aulis, is reminding all AOT workers to complete and submit your bargaining survey, which can be found online by [clicking here](#).

“Your survey responses will help me prioritize the issues most important to AOT rank-and-file workers,” explains Aulis. “I’m hoping to hear back from as many of you as possible.”

If you have questions, or input, please contact Art, who works out of the Derby garage, at (802) 673-8014 or by email at aaulis@comcast.net.

You can also send communiqués directly to the full NMU Bargaining Team by emailing NBargaining@vsea.org.

[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.

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](#)

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.

Judiciary Unit Schedules Special Meeting To Discuss Bylaw Amendments

VSEA's Judiciary Unit is inviting members to attend a special meeting on Saturday, March 14, to vote on whether or not to amend the Unit's Bylaws. The meeting begins at noon at VSEA headquarters in Montpelier.

For Unit members who cannot attend in person but want to participate in the meeting and vote, a call-in number and passcode have been set up for your convenience. To receive the call-in information, please contact VSEA Union Representative Brian Morse at bmorse@vsea.org. More important, please RSVP to Brian to let him know if you can attend in-person or over the phone.

Update: Voc Rehab Finally Invites Vermonter With TBI To Schedule Appointment

Last week, *WIA* shared a commentary posted to *VT Digger* by UVM Professor Nancy Welch. In the piece, Welch informs readers that her husband, who suffers from complications due to a brain injury, was finally ready to seek work, but when he tried to schedule an appointment with Voc Rehab for assistance, he was ostracized because he listed VSEA member John Howe as his referral. Welch wrote, "The message from Voc Rehab was clear: John Howe may not make referrals to our office. John Howe may not make recommendations." For those who might not remember, Howe dared to blow the whistle on Voc Rehab in 2014 and was retaliated against by management for his words, sparking a months-long VSEA campaign, titled "Justice for John Howe." Howe has since left Voc Rehab for a new position in the DOC.

Well, what a difference a week makes! In a Facebook post on February 19, Welch writes:

“I am thrilled and relieved to say that [my husband] just received a call from VR director Diane Dalmasse, saying they want only the best for him and to schedule him for an appointment with a Burlington-based Voc Rehab counselor. Woo-hoo. It took one month, one op-ed, a lot of terrific advice from dear friends, and the intercessions of Legal Aid and my colleague and state Senator Philip Baruth. But [my husband] has his appointment.

Note: Congratulations to you and your husband Nancy!

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.

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 25

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

February 26

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