



WEEK IN ACTION!

Weekly News From Your Union ~ February 23, 2014 – February 27, 2015

Deadline To Submit Bylaw Changes Is March 6

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.

VSEA & Supporting Organizations Hold Press Conference To Announce Union's Revenue-Generating Plan

Yesterday, VSEA Legislative Committee Chair Dr. Leslie Matthews and Executive Director Steve Howard led a press conference at the State House to roll out VSEA's alternatives to the Governor's cuts-only strategy that conference participants said is failing Vermont year after year. VSEA's announced plan includes four concrete avenues to generate new revenue for Vermont, and as Matthews and Howard said, "the [State] has said often that [it] is open to any and all ideas to prevent more cuts to services and jobs, and today we are here to present some new ideas. Hopefully, the [State] and lawmakers will listen and work with VSEA and the supporting groups here today to change the debate in Montpelier and ask the Vermonters who have benefited most during Vermont's economic downturn to do more."

VSEA was joined at the press conference by Vermont Legal Aid's Christopher Curtis, the Vermont NEA's Joel Cook, the Vermont Early Childhood Alliance's Matthew Levin, and the Vermont Workers' Center's Megan Sheehan.

To view VSEA's alternative plan to generate new revenue, or to read a recent analysis of the adverse impact of RIFs on Vermont's overall economy conducted for VSEA by Dr. Gerald Friedman, please click here: <http://bit.ly/18qbbee>

Here is some of the press generated by yesterday's conference:

Times Argus/Rutland Herald: <http://bit.ly/1BGd6rP>

Seven Days: <http://bit.ly/1LOMbLQ>

WPTZ: <http://bit.ly/1LMtmH3>

Fox 44: <http://bit.ly/1APsdf4>

WCAX: <http://bit.ly/1APkT36>

Vermont State AFL-CIO Issues Statement Of Support For VSEA Members!

VSEA sent big thanks to the VT AFL-CIO for issuing this statement on Feb. 23:

"The Vermont State Labor Council, AFL-CIO asks Vermont lawmakers to respect the collective bargaining process. The current state employees' contract is a compromise agreed between the Administration and VSEA. To seek a reopener is to challenge the fundamental principle of collective

bargaining. If wealthy private contractors and ski resorts aren't expected to open their contracts, why should state employees? The Administration's threats of furloughs and mass layoffs must stop.

If Vermont's legislators are serious about addressing income inequality, the solution cannot be extracting millions in concessions from working families while Vermont's overall regressive tax code further exacerbates inequality.

Our economy is growing, thanks in part to increased worker productivity, but working people are not seeing the fruits of our labor in higher wages. The gains are going to those at the top, who are receiving more of the state's total income. On average the top 1% of Vermont taxpayers receive 18.1 times as much income as the bottom 99%.

Yet the wealthy pay far lower tax rates than middle-income Vermonters, unnecessarily squeezing our state budget, and putting more tax pressure on the rest of us. Revenue lost because of rising inequality and regressive taxes have led to underfunding investments in public employment and higher education, skimping on public services, especially for those at the bottom of the income ladder like people with disabilities and LIHEAP recipients. But it hits all of us as services deteriorate and needs go unmet.

Taxing the top 1% at the same overall rate as middle-income Vermonters would generate an estimated \$52 million in additional revenue, while taxing the top 20% at the same rate would generate \$144 million from tax fairness. The capital gains tax exclusion alone costs Vermont \$17.3 million. Vermont should generate sufficient revenue by fixing inequities in our tax code.

New Report Finds Vermont Is #2 In The Nation, In Terms Of Places Where “The Middle Class Is Dying”

A [new report](#) issued recently by MSN 24/7 Wall Street finds that Vermont has the unfortunate distinction of being number two in the nation, in terms of places where the middle class is suffering, or “dying” as the report labels it.

“This study is even more proof of why VSEA members are fighting back this year against more cuts to our services and to state employee jobs, which are filled primarily by middle-class Vermonters,” VSEA President Shelley Martin tells WIA. “It’s past time for our elected leaders and lawmakers to acknowledge the reality that ‘yes middle-class Vermonters are hurting’ and work with VSEA to generate new revenue from the Vermonters who have not been hurt—but who have actually benefited—during our state’s repeated economic downturns.”

Here is what the report has to say about Vermont:

2. Vermont

- > **Middle income growth 2009-2013:** -5.9%
- > **Fifth quintile income growth 2009-2013:** 2.8%
- > **Fifth quintile share of income:** 48.8%
- > **Middle class household income:** \$53,020 (20th highest)

Incomes among the wealthiest 20% of Vermont households grew by nearly 3% between 2009 and 2013, the sixth largest increase nationwide. Over the same period, incomes among middle class households fell by 5.9%, one of the larger declines. As in most of the nation, income in Vermont is becoming even more concentrated among the wealthiest 5% of households. These households accounted for 21.1% of all income in Vermont in 2013, up considerably from 2009. The state's wealthiest 5% of households also accounted for the vast majority — nearly 90% — of income gains among the wealthiest 20% of households between 2009 and 2013. Despite the worsening income gap, Vermont had an exceptionally low unemployment rate, at just 4.4% in 2013, versus the national rate of 7.4%.

Minnesota Governor Being Praised For Saving His State's Economy By Taxing The Wealthiest, Raising The Minimum Wage And Ensuring Women Receive Equal Pay

[In a post this week to the Huffington Post](#), the writer explains why Gov. Mark Dayton (D) is being universally praised for the methods he employed to pull his state out a \$6.2 billion budget deficit.

Here's an excerpt:

"During his first four years in office, Gov. Dayton raised the state income tax from 7.85 to 9.85 percent on individuals earning over \$150,000, and on couples earning over \$250,000 when filing jointly -- a tax increase of \$2.1 billion. He's also agreed to raise Minnesota's minimum wage to \$9.50 an hour by 2018, and passed a state law guaranteeing equal pay for women. [Some] warned against Gov. Dayton's tax increases, saying, "The job creators, the big corporations, the small corporations, they will leave. It's all dollars and sense to them." They would be proven wrong.

Between 2011 and 2015, Gov. Dayton added 172,000 new jobs to Minnesota's economy -- that's 165,800 more jobs in Dayton's first term than [his predecessor] added in both of his terms combined. Even though Minnesota's top income tax rate is the 4th-highest in the country, it has the 5th-lowest unemployment rate in the country at 3.6 percent. According to 2012-2013 U.S. census figures, Minnesotans had a median income that was \$10,000 larger than the U.S. average, and their median income is still \$8,000 more than the U.S. average today."

Ed Note: It does make one wonder why Vermont's leaders remain so reluctant to adopt what is now a proven strategy.

Proposed Cuts To The Vets' Home, Community High School Of Vermont And 911 Emergency Dispatchers Continue To Generate Press

Vets' Home

VSEA members who attended your union's 2014 Annual Meeting in Killington might remember the remarks delivered to them at that event by the State's top official. A declaration was made from the podium that the State is steadfastly opposed to the privatization of the Vermont Veterans' Home, but it now seems that one hand is not talking to the other. [In a February 22 Vermont Press Bureau story](#), newly appointed Secretary of the Administration Justin Johnson says that, with respect to the Vets' Home, "everything is on the table," including privatization and even possible closure. Johnson's revelation was a punch in the gut to the hundreds of caregivers at the facility who were hopeful the State's top official was being genuine when promising to fight efforts to privatize the Bennington landmark. The State's bombshell announcement also drew the ire of Sen. Richard Sears (D-Bennington), who is vowing to fight any effort to privatize the Vets' Home, telling the reporter, "My job, amongst other things, is to represent Bennington County and Wilmington and one of those ways is keeping excellent state employee jobs in Bennington County. I'll do everything I can to prevent the privatization of the Veterans Home."

The State's new lack of commitment to the Vets' Home also sparked a symbolic protest this week by Viet Nam veteran Don Keelan, who publicly returned a medal awarded to him by the State of Vermont back to the State. [In a February 24 article about the medal being returned](#), Keelan is quoted, saying, "The presentation of the medal takes on even greater significance...in light of the fact that the administration is contemplating, not that they have made any decision on it, studying whether or not they should be privatizing the Veterans' Home or possibly even close it. When you make announcements such as that in the press, what does that do to the families that are trying to have their loves ones come here, or consider coming here, if in fact they're in doubt as to whether or not the place will be open for them." He adds that the State's announcement makes veterans leery of choosing to live at the home, and it make nurses and other staff wary of seeking employment there.

911 Emergency Dispatch Centers

Opposition to the State's plan to consolidate Vermont's four 911 Emergency Dispatch Centers into just two is growing, according to a [February 23 VT Digger story](#). In the piece, several Rutland lawmakers are featured, voicing their opposition to the State's plan; one saying "I don't think it was very well thought out," and another openly challenging whether the State will actually achieve the savings it says it will. Also featured in the story is VSEA member Tom Lague, a Dispatcher working in the 911 Center in Derby, or one of the two facilities being targeted for closure by the State. Lague laments the adverse impact the closure would have on the Northeast Kingdom, where he lives. "In the Derby area, it's a depressed area," Lague explains. "We have the highest unemployment in the state in Orleans County. Eighteen months ago, they were basically saying there weren't enough of us, and now they're saying they can reduce the number of personnel by what amounts to one-third."

And it seemed serendipitous this week when, given all the rhetoric from State and DPS officials about how technology has evolved to the point that Vermont can actually consider this 911 consolidation, *USA Today* was publishing a piece this week titled "[911's Deadly Flaw: Lack of Location Data: A Technology Shortfall Can Lead to Tragic Results, a National Investigation Shows](#)." The piece tells the story of how technology failed one Georgia woman, leading to her death, and it warns states not to rely too heavily on technology, writing, "In an era when your mobile phone can tell Facebook, Uber or even video games where you're located – with amazing accuracy – 911 operators are often left in the dark. Your chance of 911 getting a quick fix on location ranges from as low as 10% to as high as 95%, according to hundreds of pages of local, state and federal documents obtained and reviewed by USA TODAY and more than 40 Gannett newspapers and television stations across the country."

Community High School of Vermont

Nice story about the great work being done daily at the Community High School of Vermont in the [February 21 St. Albans Messenger](#). One of the VSEA members featured in the piece is John Cross, who has taught the CHSVT's automotive program for more than 20 years at Northeast State. Cross shares that he has letters from numerous past students who have gone on to be successful and have helped the next generation – their children – stay out of the system too. "I know that hundreds of guys who have gone through here and gone and gotten employment," he says. He's taught women, too, and adds that they have left the St. Albans facility (when it was formerly the women's prison) and found work fixing cars. "They're making a good living, not on the system. They're giving back and learning stuff, becoming part of the community, and it's powerful."

VSEA President Receives Updated RIF Protocol From State

VSEA President Shelley Martin asked *WIA* to share [this link](#) with members. It's an updated RIF protocol (titled: Associated Class Eligibility Determination Process For Reduction In Force Purposes) Martin requested from DHR, and she is urging members to familiarize themselves with the protocol, especially now, as the State is refusing to budge from its cuts-only strategy.

"Obviously, VSEA's goal remains to prevent any state employee from ever having to use this protocol, but we can't ignore the reality of the situation swirling around us right now, so I want to begin educating people now about their RIF rights," explains Martin. "RIFs, even one, are a worst-case scenario we all hope to avoid, but I want members armed with as much information as possible, just in case."

Auditor's Report On Gruber Contract Raises Broader Questions About The State's Oversight Of Private Contracts

You may have seen or heard the [recent news reports about State Auditor Doug Hoffer's findings](#) after auditing the way the State's health care consultant Johnathan Gruber was billing the state for his services. Hoffer discovered a massive lack of contract oversight by the state, and he reports that taxpayer dollars were being spent, possibly recklessly, without any real accountability.

The issue is important because, for years, VSEA members have been publicly questioning Vermont's private-contracting practices and asking if a lack of accountability is costing the state possibly millions of dollars--money that could now be going to protect the state services being served up by the Governor to be cut.

In a letter to the editor in today's Times Argus, a reader shares VSEA's concerns and articulates them well.

The letter reads:

“How come those in charge of our tax dollars in state government are all of a sudden up in an uproar over the Gruber health care contract? Is this the first contract that has cost the state (your tax dollars) so much for so little?”

Maybe it's not the contractor, but the contractee that should be looked into more closely, since this seems to be a recurring issue. Someone at the state level has approved both the work and payment since the beginning of this contract with Gruber. Are they still employed?

It wasn't until Gruber made inappropriate comments that his charges were looked into. Why wasn't this caught right from the start of this contract? How many other contracts in state government are being processed in this same manner? Continuous independent audits should be mandated on all state contracts to make sure the state is spending our tax dollars appropriately.”

*Jacinthe Pellerin
Montpelier*

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](#)

Special Brattleboro Chapter Meeting Is March 4!

VSEA Brattleboro Chapter President Robin Rieske is inviting Chapter members to a special meeting on Wednesday, March 4, to discuss proposed budget cuts to services and jobs with local Windham County lawmakers. The meeting begins at 4:45 p.m. and is being held at the Marina Restaurant on Putney Road in Brattleboro. VSEA Executive Director Steve Howard will be in attendance.

Rieske is urging members to come prepared to briefly share how cuts to the services or programs Brattleboro Chapter members provide would impact Windham County in the short or long term. She also wants members to share with lawmakers what they can do to help VSEA members stop the cuts.

For more information, or to **RSVP**, please contact Robin at rrieske@sover.net or call her cell at (802) 275-7232.

Hors d'oeuvres and drinks provided!

Mark The Date Chittenden Chapter Members!

Chittenden Chapter President Kara Haynes asked *WIA* to announce that the Chapter's next meeting will be Tuesday, March 10, at the Department of Vermont Health Access (DVHA), located at 312 Hurricane Lane in Williston. The meeting begins at 5:30 p.m., and a dinner will be served. Kara hopes to see you there!

Judiciary Unit Posts New Trial Protocol, Clarifying VSEA Access To Court Facilities

This week, a "Protocol Clarifying VSEA Access To Court Facilities" was posted to the Judiciary Unit's page on the VSEA website. The protocol is being implemented on a trial basis in order to resolve certain disputes concerning the administration of Article 3 of the collective bargaining agreement as it relates to VSEA representatives visiting Judiciary facilities. VSEA is urging its Judiciary Unit members to review the new protocol, which can be found by [clicking here](#).

VSEA Labor Educator Announces Spring Steward Trainings

VSEA Labor Educator Tim Lenoach has scheduled the following trainings:

Basic Steward Trainings

The following basic trainings are from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the:

VTrans Training Center
1716 U.S. Rte. 302
Berlin

Steward 1: Introduction and the Basics

Tuesday, March 24

Steward 2: Protecting the Contract and Building the Union

Tuesday, April 14

Steward 3: The Contract and Challenges in the Workplace

Tuesday, April 28

Advanced Topic Trainings

Unless otherwise noted, the following advanced trainings are from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the:

VTrans Training Center
1716 U.S. Rte. 302
Berlin

Investigations and working with Human Resources

Thursday, March 26

Thursday, April 30 – DVHA, Room 201, 312 Hurricane Lane, Williston

Stewards and Labor Management Committees

Tuesday, March 31

Wednesday, May 13

Specific Bargaining Unit and Agency/Department Trainings

The following specific BU and A/D trainings are from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the:

VTrans Training Center
1716 U.S. Rte. 302
Berlin

Judiciary Bargaining Unit

Thursday April 9

Agency of Transportation

Thursday April 23

Department of Corrections Bargaining Unit

Wednesday May 6

Supervisory Bargaining Unit

Wednesday May 20

For more information about a training, or to register, please [click here](#).

Questions? Please contact Labor Educator Tim Lenocho by email at tlenoch@vsea.org, or by phone at 2223-5247.

VSEA Member Seeking Support In Her Re-Election Bid To VSECU Board

VSEA is urging members belonging to the Vermont State Employees' Credit Union (VSECU) to please cast a vote for Judy Rosenstreich to be re-elected to the VSECU Board of Directors. Judy is a past VSEA Executive Director who currently works as a Senior Policy Advisor in the Department of Mental Health.

“I am the only state employee on the Board of Directors,” Rosenstreich wrote in a post to VSEA’s Facebook page this week. “I also am up for re-election now and would appreciate your vote. We have a very strong credit union and I want to continue serving all members across the state. Thanks!”

Voting ends on March 18, which is also the date of the VSECU’s Annual Meeting. VSECU members should have already received an online ballot, or a ballot through the U.S. Mail, but if you don’t remember receiving one, please [click here](#) for more information. VSECU members can also vote in person at the Annual Meeting on March 18.

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.

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 aulis@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.

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:

March 3

Joint Safety & Health Committee Meeting

Records Building

Middlesex

9:00 a.m.

March 4

Special Brattleboro Chapter Meeting

Marina Restaurant

Putney Rd.

Brattleboro

4:45 p.m.