

# WEEK IN ACTION!

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

## State Gives Commissioners & Secretaries Four Days To Identify Cuts

Secretary of the Administration Justin Johnson sent a memo mid-week to all Commissioners and Secretaries, informing them they had until Monday, March 16, to submit a list of position cuts to him. The heads are being instructed to find a total of 325 position cuts to meet an arbitrary dollar amount of \$10.8 million in personnel savings the State says it needs to fill Vermont's budget hole. Johnson tells State heads to focus first on vacancy savings, but when asked to comment on that specific request, VSEA Executive Director Steve Howard reminded WCAX that "vacancy savings" is an approach that puts Vermonters in jeopardy and negatively impacts services, pointing to the well-documented issues confronting DCF Family Services workers and their clients. In other media outlets, Howard continued to advocate for VSEA's revenue-generating plan and highlight a recent study that placed Vermont number two in the nation in terms of where the middle class is hurting most. "The state's middle class is dying here," Howard told the *Free Press*. "The state employees represent that middle class."

"The State is unfortunately doing what it feels it must, but VSEA knows there is a better way, and we continue to remain hopeful that Vermont lawmakers will reject the State's cuts-heavy strategy and incorporate some of the cost-savings proposals VSEA has developed and shared," VSEA President Shelley Martin tells *WIA*. "It's so important for every VSEA member to contact their local legislators right now to remind them that state employees are tax payers too and there are alternatives to cuts."

Earlier this week, President Martin sent an email update and call-to-action to all state employees and retirees, concerning VSEA's campaign to fight back against the State's proposed cuts to services and jobs. If you missed it, you can read it by [clicking here](#).

## Lawmakers Schedule 3/17 Public Hearing On State's Proposed Cut To Dispatch Centers

VSEA is urging members who are able to attend a legislative hearing on Tuesday, March 17, at the State House in Montpelier to take public comment on the State's proposed consolidation of Vermont's four Public Safety Answering Points (PSAPs) into just two. The hearing begins at 5:30 p.m. in Room 11 and VSEA frontline Dispatchers will be joined at the hearing by first responders from across Vermont who are opposed to the State's plan, primarily due to public safety concerns.

If you have questions or want to RSVP to this event, please email Jennifer Larsen at [jlarsen@vsea.org](mailto:jlarsen@vsea.org) or call at (802)223-5247

*Note: Last Friday, Dispatchers received a huge boost when the Professional Firefighters of Vermont issued a public statement of support for their Dispatcher colleagues. Read the PFFV's full letter by [clicking here](#).*

## VSEA Members Testify Against State's Proposed Cuts

The Legislature's House Appropriations Committee held a public hearing at the State House on March 12 to take comment on the State's proposed cuts to meet a newly identified \$18 million budget hole. The list includes draconian ideas like privatizing the Veterans' Home, closing the Windsor correctional facility, shutting down VOSHA, closing state parks, eliminating DII and a host of other bad ideas.

VSEA was well represented at the hearing by leaders and members, including VSEA President Shelley Martin, who testified about VSEA's revenue plan and how it could prevent a lot of the proposed cuts. VSEA First VP Michelle Salvador made a strong case to fund and protect the Vermont Veterans' Home. DPS member John Mangione testified about the adverse impact and high cost of privatization, and DCF member Michael Gordon addressed employee parking issues. VSEA members Aimee Towne and Matt Jakubowski and retiree Joanie Maclay also attended the hearing.

## **How Will AOT Employee Ed Olsen Fare In 2015, Even With The Scheduled Pay Increase?**

Remember AOT employee Ed Olsen He recently wrote a terrific letter to the Governor about how hard it is to make ends meet on his current salary, and how unfair it is for the State to ask frontline employees to open up their contracts and give back again. WIA asked VSEA Policy Analyst Adam Norton to research how much Ed stands to gain if the State honors the wage increase it bargained with VSEA members in good faith. Here's Adam's analysis:

- Ed currently earns \$1421.60 (pre-tax) bi-weekly or \$36,961.60 (pre-tax) annually.
- Like all state employees, Ed just got hit with an unexpected 18% health care premium increase. This means—already in the first six months of 2015—the amount of Ed's salary going bi-weekly towards his health care premium jumped from 8.65% to 10.2%.
- Ed's now looking forward to little relief in July 2015 from the 2.5% pay raise the State just negotiated with employees in 2014, but not so fast Ed. Even if you receive the negotiated raise, 63% of your pay increase is going immediately to cover the unforeseen 18% health care premium hike.
- This means that after Ed's premium is covered, his 2.5% pay increase will amount to just a .9% increase, and his net increase in take-home pay every two weeks will be \$13.08.

## **CHSVT Educator Pens Commentary Defending Program's Important Role In Helping The DOC Fulfill Its Overall Mission**

Community High School of Vermont (CHSVT) educator Troy McAllister had an excellent commentary published this week on *VTDigger*. He wrote it in an effort to provide lawmakers and the public with more information about the critical role the CHSVT plays in helping the Vermont DOC fulfill its overall mission, which is to provide Vermont offenders, while incarcerated, with the skills and knowledge needed to make them productive and contributing members of society.

As *WIA* readers hopefully know, the State is proposing to cut roughly half of the funds currently allocated to the CHSVT program, which will do considerable damage to this essential service.

To read Troy's full commentary, or to share it with others, please [click here](#).

## **New Report Recommends DOC Hire 58 New Positions**

A new study commissioned by lawmakers to examine current staffing levels within the Department of Corrections has determined that a need exists to hire as many as 58 new positions in order for Vermont's seven correctional facilities to be adequately staffed.

The study, conducted by the Association of State Correctional Administrators and [reported on by VTDigger](#), recommends that the DOC hire 29 Corrections Officers under current staffing practice and consider adding an extra 29 positions for safety and security reasons.

“Public safety, as well as officer and inmate safety, are the primary considerations in making these recommendations,” the report states.

VSEA DOC Unit Chair Dave Bellini is quoted in the story, saying, “VSEA’s corrections members have been telling the state and lawmakers for years that they needed to hire more full-time COs, but you see where that got us. At least we have proof now that our concerns are legitimate, and we hope this report will now lead to all of Vermont’s prisons being fully and adequately staffed.” Bellini expanded on his comment to *WIA*, adding, “VSEA was happy to see that the national experts agree with us that Vermont’s prisons are currently understaffed and that we need to add more positions. Not having enough frontline employees in our prisons creates a situation where there are safety concerns, not only for the employee but also for the inmates and maybe even for the public.”

In the story, DOC Deputy Commissioner Lisa Menard defends the DOC’s current staffing levels, telling *Digger*, “We run safe institutions,” but at the same time admitting, “However, there is overtime involved in that, and that’s not the best practice fiscally.”

Menard would not comment on whether or not the DOC would act on the recommendations, pending lawmakers review of the study after they receive it today.

## **Vermont Public Assets Institute Posts Statement Opposing State’s Cuts Strategy**

The well-respected Vermont Public Assets Institute posted a statement to its website last week, refuting the State’s cuts-only strategy as the way to address Vermont’s ongoing budget deficits.

The post opens with:

*“Montpelier is struggling to plug a state budget gap again this year—\$113 million. As in the past, the preferred option is cutting Vermont’s already slashed-to-slivers state services. While austerity proponents love it, this strategy will make Vermonters more miserable, especially those who’ve seen their real incomes decline for a decade. Cuts also dampen the state’s economy. Why put Vermont through this again?”*

It also includes:

*“**Taxes are targeted at taxpayers with less money.** Vermont’s taxes overall take a smaller bite of income from those at the top than from those in the middle and at the bottom. With more of Vermont’s income going to the top, the state gets less revenue than it could despite reasonable economic growth. Removing income tax breaks, especially those enjoyed by upper-income Vermonters, would increase revenues while improving the fairness of the tax system.”*

The entire post is worth reading and sharing, which you can do by [clicking here](#).

## **VSEA Holding S. 14 Meeting On March 17**

On Tuesday, March 17, VSEA is holding a special meeting to discuss the requirements of the S.14 legislation passed in 2013. The meeting begins at 4:00 p.m. at VSEA headquarters in Montpelier.

S. 14 reads:

*“Annually, the employees of the bargaining unit shall meet and discuss whether employees who have chosen not to join the employee organization shall be allowed to vote on the ratification of any collective bargaining agreement entered into pursuant to this chapter. After discussion, employees that are members of the employee organization shall vote on whether to allow employees who have chosen*

*not to join the employee organization to vote on the ratification of any collective bargaining agreement.”*

## **VSEA Schedules Fight Back Campaign Phase II Update Meetings**

VSEA leaders and organizers continue to host worksite meetings across Vermont to educate members about phase two of the VSEA’s “Fight Back” campaign and how members can engage and join your union’s campaign to stop the cuts to services and jobs.

Here are the Fight Back meetings scheduled for next week:

### March 16

Lamoille Valley Chapter Meeting  
Includes Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update  
Morrisville  
6:00 p.m.

### March 16

DCF Family Services Labor/Management Meeting  
Includes Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update  
VSEA HQ  
Montpelier

### March 17

Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update Meeting  
ESD Burlington District Office  
Pearl St.  
Burlington  
8:00 a.m.

### March 17

Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update Meeting  
Brattleboro State Office Building  
Brattleboro  
Noon

### March 17

Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update Meeting  
McFarland State Office Building  
Barre  
Noon

### March 17

Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update Meeting  
Marble Valley Labor/Management Committee Meeting  
Rutland  
1:00 p.m.

### March 18

Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update Meeting  
AOT Mendon Garage  
Mendon  
10:00 a.m.

March 18

Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update Meeting  
Rutland District Court House  
9 Merchants Row, GAL Room  
Rutland  
Noon

March 18

Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update Meeting  
Gilman Office Complex, Bldg. 1  
ESD Conference Room, First Floor  
White River Junction  
Noon

March 18

Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update Meeting  
108 Cherry St.,  
Conference Room 2A  
Burlington  
Noon

March 19

Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update Meeting  
Springfield State Office Building  
First Floor Conference Room  
100 Mineral St.  
Springfield

March 20

Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update Meeting  
DVHA  
312 Hurricane Lane, Conference Room  
Williston  
Noon

**Lamoille Valley Chapter Meeting Is Monday, March 16!**

The Lamoille Valley Chapter will meet on Monday, March 16, at 5:00 p.m. in the AHS Conference Room in the State Office Building at 63 Professional Dr. in Morrisville. The Chapter has invited representatives of VSEA Bargaining Teams and the Board of Trustees to attend the meeting to talk about Vermont's budget deficit, what's being asked of state employees and what ideas VSEA has brought to the table to date to counter the State's heavy reliance on service and job cuts. A portion of this meeting will also be devoted to a discussion of the next phase of the VSEA Fight Back campaign.

**Central Vermont Chapter Members. Mark The Date!**

VSEA's Central Vermont Chapter has scheduled its next meeting for Tuesday, March 24, at VSEA headquarters in Montpelier, beginning at 5:00 p.m. This is an important meeting because the Chapter will be conducting officer elections. Pizza is being provided!

## **VSEA Reminds Chapters To Collect Rebates**

VSEA Fiscal Coordinator Amy Haskins asked *WIA* to remind the following VSEA Chapter officers to request their annual Chapter rebates:

- Addison
- Barre
- Brattleboro
- Central VT
- Chittenden
- Franklin/GI
- Lamoille
- Newport/IP
- Springfield
- Waterbury

The deadline to submit your rebate request is May 1, 2015. If you have any questions please contact Amy by email at [Ahaskins@vsea.org](mailto:Ahaskins@vsea.org)

## **Deadline Is May 31 To Apply For 2015 Vermont State Colleges Staff Federation Scholarship!**

A Vermont State Colleges' Staff Federation scholarship is intended to help VSEA members and their spouses, dependents or domestic partners who are seeking financial assistance to pursue post-secondary educational goals at one of the following: Castleton State College, Lyndon State College, Johnson State College or Vermont Technical College. The deadline to apply is May 31, 2015.

VSCSF scholarship applications should be sent to:

Monique Prive, Librarian  
c/o Lyndon State College  
P.O. Box 919

Lyndonville, VT 05851 - 0919

If you want an application or have questions, contact Monique by phone at 802 - 626 - 6364 or email her at [monique.prive@lyndonstate.edu](mailto:monique.prive@lyndonstate.edu).

Download an application by [clicking here](#).

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

## **VSEA Sends Condolences To VPR On Death Of Reporter Susan Keese**

After learning this week about the untimely death of VPR reporter Susan Keese, VSEA sent its condolences to the entire VPR family.

“Before even turning on her recorder, Susan would take time with nervous or shy rank-and-file workers, trying to calm their nerves a little and getting to know them a little as well,” said VSEA

Communications Director Doug Gibson. “Susan’s reporting was extremely helpful when VSEA was fighting to get workers removed from the Bennington State Office Building, and her reporting on the struggles at the Vermont Veterans’ Home was very important because there aren’t a lot of media outlets

in southern Vermont, so her stories kept Vermonters statewide up to date on the goings-on at the Vets' Home. She'll be missed."

[Click here](#) to read more about VPR Reporter Susan Keese's life.

## **VSEA Insurance Representative In Montpelier Next Week**

VSEA Insurance Representative Joanne Woodcock will be in Montpelier next week at the following locations to talk with interested VSEA members about member-only insurance benefits.

### **133 State Street**

March 17 and 18

Downstairs Conference Room #21

12:00 to 4:00

### **109 State Street**

Pavilion Building

March 20

4<sup>th</sup> Floor Conference Room

12:00 to 4:00

### **Dept. of Labor**

5 Green Mountain Drive

March 24

2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Conference Room

12:00 to 4:00

### **National Life**

Justin Morrill Conference Room

6<sup>th</sup> Floor

March 26 and 27

12:00 to 4:00

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.

## **VT Workers Center Holding "Community Dialogue" On March 15**

The Vermont Workers' Center is hosting a meeting on Sunday, March 15, titled, "Community Dialogue: Toward Human Rights and a People's Economy." It begins at 3:00 p.m. at the Unitarian Universalist Church at 152 Pearl Street in Burlington. In addition to debating the topics of human and environmental justice, the event will feature food and singing.

Questions? Contact Matt at the Workers' Center by phone at 373-0133 or by email at [matt@workerscenter.org](mailto:matt@workerscenter.org).

**[CLICK HERE FOR BROCHURE](#)**

## **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 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."

## **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](mailto:aaulis@comcast.net).

You can also send communiqués directly to the full NMU Bargaining Team by emailing [NBargaining@vsea.org](mailto: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.

## **VSEA Labor Educator Announces Upcoming Trainings For Council Members**

*VSEA Labor Educator Tim Leno* has scheduled the following trainings, specifically targeted to VSEA Council members:

Each training includes:

- Public service and the greater good;
- Public sector unionism;
- Role and governing function of the Council;
- Representing co-workers; and
- How can the Council help build a stronger VSEA.

### Southwest VT

Friday, April 3  
Fourth Floor Conference Room  
Asa Bloomer Building  
Rutland

### Southeast VT

Friday, April 10  
First Floor Conference Room  
State Office Building  
100 Mineral St.  
Springfield

### Northwest VT

Friday, April 17  
DVHA  
Room 201  
312 Hurricane Lane  
Williston

### Northeast VT

Friday, April 24  
Emory Hebard Building  
Room 250  
100 Main St.  
Newport

## Central VT

Friday, May 8  
Vtrans Training Center  
1716 U.S. Rte. 302  
Berlin

All Council trainings are from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

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

Questions? Please contact Labor Educator Tim Lenoach by email at [tlenoach@vsea.org](mailto:tlenoach@vsea.org), or by phone at 2223-5247.

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

#### **March 15**

Workers Center “Community Dialogue” Event  
Unitarian Universalist Church  
152 Pearl St.  
Burlington  
3:00 p.m.

#### **March 16**

Lamoille Valley Chapter Meeting  
State Office Building, AHS Conference Room  
63 Professional Dr.  
Morrisville  
5:00 p.m.  
**6:00 p.m. - Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update**

#### **March 16**

DCF Family Services Labor/Management Meeting  
Includes Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update  
VSEA HQ  
Montpelier

#### **March 17**

Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update Meeting  
ESD Burlington District Office  
Pearl St.  
Burlington  
8:00 a.m.

#### **March 17**

Board of Trustees’ Meeting  
VSEA HQ  
Montpelier  
9:30 a.m.

#### **March 17**

Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update Meeting  
Brattleboro State Office Building  
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Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update Meeting  
Marble Valley Labor/Management Committee Meeting  
Rutland  
1:00 p.m.

**March 17**

S. 14 Meeting  
VSEA HQ  
Montpelier  
4:00 p.m.

**March 17**

Save The Dispatchers! Public Hearing  
State House, Room 11  
Montpelier  
5:30 p.m.

**March 18**

Retiree' Chapter Meeting  
VSEA HQ  
Montpelier  
9:00 a.m.

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Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update Meeting  
AOT Mendon Garage  
Mendon  
10:00 a.m.

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Springfield State Office Building  
First Floor Conference Room  
100 Mineral St.  
Springfield

**March 20**

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

**March 20**

Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update Meeting  
DVHA  
312 Hurricane Lane, Conference Room  
Williston  
Noon