



WEEK IN ACTION!

Weekly News From Your Union ~ March 23, 2015 – March 27, 2015

VSEA President's Update To Members On Budget Fight

VSEA President Shelley Martin asked WIA to share the following message from her to the membership:

Dear Members:

This week marked the first of what is likely to be many twists and turns to the debate about the state budget.

Your union is fighting back and you are winning! Already in what is just the first step in the budget debate; your phone calls, emails, petitions and one-to-one conversations have moved members of the House of Representatives to adopt a budget that still needs improvement, but one I can honestly report to you is much better than the State's proposal. We are moving forward in a positive direction to save state jobs and to protect state services.

With the approval of your elected representatives on the Board of Trustees, we are in discussions with the State about "alternative savings" that could provide budget relief on non-contractual issues. These alternative savings suggestions, if mutually agreed upon, would replace the "labor savings" contained in the State's budget proposal and in the budget adopted yesterday by the House of Representatives. If we can come to an agreement, the savings could potentially save the state workforce from the 150-350 layoffs the State has announced.

Your leadership and your staff have made clear that we will not be opening the contract to find savings. In any meeting where ideas have been presented, your elected member leaders have been present and participating. I want to reassure you that the VSEA staff and leadership will not be entering into any back room deals with the State.

Let's all continue to keep fighting and hoping for a positive outcome for all state employees and the Vermonters who use our services.

In Solidarity.

Mark The Date! VSEA "Fight Back" Rally Is April 11. Volunteers Wanted!

As reported last week in *WIA*, VSEA leaders have approved a "Fight Back" rally on the steps of the State House for Saturday, April 11 at noon. VSEA members will be joined in solidarity at the rally by members of other Vermont labor unions, community supporters and groups representing populations that could be harmed by the State's budget cuts, including the disabled and elderly.

In advance of the rally, VSEA is casting a net to find member-volunteers who want to assist with event's planning and coordination. If you would be interested in volunteering to help, please contact VSEA Organizing Director Kristin Warner at kwarnerv@vsea.org.

VSEA members are urged to keep an eye on your email in the coming days for rally news and updates.

"April 11 is a golden opportunity for VSEA members and our supporters to send a strong message to Montpelier that cuts are not the answer and new revenue is," says VSEA President Shelley Martin.

House Passes Budget Bill That Contains Some Victories For VSEA! Personnel Savings' Budget Hole Remains.

A lot of activity yesterday at the State House, as the House of Representatives began debating its FY2016 budget bill. At the end of the day, the results were a mixed bag for VSEA members; some good, some not.

Prior to a vote late yesterday by the full House on a Ways and Means Committee revenue package to help close Vermont's budget deficit, lawmakers belonging to the body's Working Vermonters' Caucus led an effort to try and pass two revenue generating amendments that if adopted, would, in part, help to plug the budget hole the State continues to demand state employees fill with "personnel savings."

The first amendment, which was championed by Rep. Susan Hatch Davis, would have instituted a new \$2 fee on a hotel night's stay in Vermont and raised millions in new revenue. Unfortunately, the amendment received just 16 votes in support. To see a roll-call vote on the amendment, please [click here](#).

Rep. Jean O'Sullivan introduced the second amendment, and it attempted to make Vermont's income tax code more equitable for low- and middle-income Vermonters. The amendment would have also generated millions in new revenue, but it too was defeated, although this time around, 43 Representatives voted in favor of the idea. To see a roll-call vote on the amendment, please [click here](#).

"VSEA is urging members to review the roll-call vote results on this amendment and to please send a message of thanks to the 43 legislators who stood with working Vermonters to support this amendment—especially if you are a constituent of one of the 43," VSEA President Shelley Martin tells *WIA*. She also wanted to thank members who took time yesterday to contact their legislators to support the amendments.

After the dust had settled from the amendment debates, the House turned its attention to the Ways and Means Committee's \$33.2 million revenue package. The package, which does not include new revenue to relieve state employees from the State's mandate to find personnel savings, passed narrowly 76-67.

By day's end, the House was ready to take up the big budget bill, which it passed by a 96-46 margin. Contained within the budget that passed were several positive things for VSEA members. Here are some:

- Full funding of the Vermont Veterans' Home;
- The permanent placement of a VSEA member on the Vermont Veterans' Home Board of Trustees (removal of a sunset provision limiting term to one year);
- Restoration of a majority of the proposed cut to Community High School of Vermont (went from \$1.7 million cut to \$250,000 cut);
- Funding of 911 Emergency Dispatch Centers thru September and the establishment of a process to involve more stakeholders (including Dispatchers) in future decisions.
- Removal of a \$500,000 cut to the Judiciary; and
- Omission of a proposal to implement an automatic contract re-opener and alter subjects of bargaining.

"VSEA is excited to report to members on the House of Representatives vote to pass a budget that includes several victories for VSEA members," Legislative Director Ben Palkowski told *WIA* shortly after the vote. "These victories would not have been possible without VSEA members' hard work, expertise and vigilant lobbying."

Palkowski acknowledged that while yesterday's House budget victories are important and will help a lot, VSEA members are still faced with the question of how to find the State's mandated \$5 million to \$11 million in personnel savings. That piece was not addressed in the final House budget.

"The budget debate now moves to the Senate side, so our work now is to try to convince enough Senators to adopt our funding alternatives, so we can negate the need for state employees to have to come up millions in personnel savings," explain Palkowski. "We got some victories in the House budget bill, and now we all must work together to protect these wins and hopefully add to them in the Senate's budget bill. I urge all VSEA members to keep an eye on your email in the coming days and weeks, and if you receive a message to contact your Senators, then please do, and ask your friends and family to do the same. This will be an all-hands-on-deck approach."

Chittenden Members Gathering Tomorrow At Ri Ra To Draft "Fight Back" Letters And Posts

VSEA members in the Burlington area tomorrow (Saturday, March 28) are invited to drop by the Ri Ra Irish Pub from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. to participate in a "Fight Back" letter-writing/message-generating session. The Pub is located at 123 Church Street. VSEA members will be drafting "Fight Back" letters to the editor, posts to Front Porch Forum and messages to lawmakers. Appetizers are free and so are non-alcoholic beverages! Questions? Contact VSEA Organizer Tim Boyle at tboyle@vsea.org.

Congratulations DCF 3SquaresVT Workers. What A Turnaround!

VSEA sent huge congratulations this week to state employees working for DCF's 3SquaresVT food program. In a March 25 memo to DCF ESD workers, Deputy Commissioner Sean Brown said he recently learned that Vermont was named the most improved state in the nation for FY2014 in terms of lowering its processing error rate. The Program's error rate dropped from 9.81% in FY2013 to just 2.58% in FY2014. As a result, Vermont expects to receive a monetary "bonus" this year for its efforts, as opposed to being penalized over the past few years.

"I cannot even begin to express how proud I am to work with such a dedicated and talented group of staff across the state," wrote Brown. These two achievements belong to you and are the result of your amazing work over the past year. Simply put, CONGRATULATIONS and THANK YOU!!

Brown's thanks is well deserved, as this is a group of workers who were tasked years ago with trying to make an ill-conceived "modernization" plan work, and who suffered detrimental position cuts during the height of Vermont's recession—just as need for the food program was peaking.

"These ESD workers have struggled mightily for years to do the best they could with the resources provided," said VSEA President Shelley Martin. "Once the workers' suggestions were listened to and the past position cuts were restored, the ship began to turn around, and the result is fantastic. The issues that led to the DCF error-rate mess should serve as a prime example of how service and job cuts hurt Vermonters."

VSEA 911 Dispatchers Continue To Speak Out Against Consolidation

VSEA 911 Emergency Dispatcher Trish Bennett said it best this week during an interview on WDEV's Equal Time Radio when she described this week's news that Vermont's four Dispatch Centers (a.k.a. PSAPs) would not be cut to two until September 2015 a "stay of execution."

One of the items emerging from this week's budget debate at the State House was news that the proposed consolidation is being taken off the fast track, meaning instead of closing in April or May, the Derby and Rutland PSAPs will continue to operate through September. The thinking being the delay will give DPS and the Dispatchers more time to coordinate the consolidation better and involve more voices in the planning discussions.

“It’s a temporary reprieve, but nothing more,” VSEA President Shelley Martin tells *WIA*. “VSEA’s fight continues to stop the consolidation and convince officials and lawmakers to take the warnings our frontline Dispatchers and thousands of first responders across Vermont have been issuing about the consolidation seriously. I’m really proud of the great job our Dispatchers did this week defending their service on the radio.”

On Monday, Trish Bennett appeared on VPR’s *Vermont Edition*, where she made a strong case against consolidation and against cutting good-paying jobs in Derby and Rutland. Joining her in the discussion was Rutland County Fire Mutual Aid President Bob Schlachter, who spoke against the consolidation for first responders. DPS Commissioner Flynn was also on the show. You can listen to the show by [clicking here](#).

On Tuesday, Bennett was back at it, this time appearing on WDEV’s Equal Time Radio with colleague Nick Sheehan, a VSEA Dispatcher in Rutland. The two did an awesome job presenting all the arguments against the consolidation and they explained to the interviewer how frustrated the frontline workers about the way their voices and the voices of thousands of Vermont first responders are seemingly being ignored. You can listen the show by [clicking here](#).

Brattleboro P&P Member And VSEA Retiree Pen Great “Fight Back” Letters To Local Media

On March 23, *The Commons* publication in Windham County published a great letter to the editor submitted by VSEA member Michael Arace, who works in the Brattleboro Parole and Probation office.

Here’s an excerpt:

The VSEA has been quoted as being ‘unreasonable’ and not willing to work with the State. What is ‘unreasonable’ is asking the hard-working people of this state to fix a problem that is not ours. Day after day, we come to work and do our very best to keep this state running. It is rare that we are appreciated by the [State] for the hard work that we do. It is rare that there is anything good published about state employee.” He continues, “*VSEA has presented a revenue plan. This plan is not ‘unreasonable.’ It is ‘unreasonable’ to think that the families in this state who keep the Vermont way of life alive have to live in poverty. Stop the cuts. Raise more revenue.”*

VSEA retiree and activist Tony Smith also wrote an excellent letter that was published recently in the *Hardwick Gazette*.

Here’s an excerpt:

“When revenues fall short, services are cut. People are laid off. Fewer dollars circulate in the economy, so next year’s revenues fall short again and we repeat the cycle. Fundamental change is needed. State lawmakers could make a difference. They could tax the rich and corporations and financial transactions because that is where the money resides.”

To read Michael and Tony’s full letters, please [click here](#).

VSEA Launches New Revenue Ads On *VTDigger*

This week, VSEA began running a new series of ads on the online media site *VTDigger*, promoting your union’s plan to generate \$30 million in new revenue for Vermont, as opposed to state employees having to find \$5 million to \$11 million in “personnel savings.”

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

VSEA Fight Back Campaign Phase II Meetings Continue

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 where Fight Back meetings are scheduled for next week (if time not listed, the FB presentation slot is TBD):

March 31

Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update Meeting

Agriculture Building

Room 210

Montpelier

Noon

New Public Assets Institute Report Shows Again That Tax Capacity Does Exist At The Top

A new Public Assets Institute report again shows that the capacity exists for the State and lawmakers to move some of the tax burden from Vermont's middle class to its wealthiest citizens--and save services and jobs! The report includes a very telling chart that clearly illustrates the existing capacity.

From the study:

"Vermont's income tax is among the lowest in the country: 2.7 percent of the state's total personal income.¹ Eliminating tax breaks and lowering income tax rates would balance the fiscal 2016 budget without cuts and still leave Vermont's effective income tax rate lower than those of 24 other states."

To read the report, please [click here](#).

VSEA Communications Committee Looking To Gather Local Community Event Participation And Volunteer Opportunities!

For a few years now, VSEA's Chittenden Chapter has invited VSEA members from across Vermont to attend a Lake Monsters baseball game on a special night each summer dedicated in part to VSEA members and the services they provide. The Chapter also recently began reaching out to local charitable organizations to invite some of their clients to the game as well. As an added benefit, the Chapter always hosts a well-attended barbeque before the game, saving members and their families the expense of having to purchase a meal at the game. The event has been a huge success, and it's the kind of Chapter/member-building opportunity the newly reconstituted VSEA Communications Committee wants to help Chapters promote and solicit members to attend.

If you know of local events in your community that VSEA Chapters could tie into (i.e. Brattleboro's annual "Strolling of the Heifers" or Northfield's annual Labor Day Parade), please pass your idea(s) along to Communications Committee Chairperson Doug Kievit-Kylar, who is compiling a master list of possibilities and will be sharing the submitted ideas with Chapter and Unit officers. Doug is also interested in other VSEA member volunteer opportunities in your community, such as helping out at a local food shelf or other local charitable organizations.

If you have some ideas, or if you have questions, please email them to VSEA's Communications Committee Chair at Doug.Kievit-Kylar@state.vt.us. If possible, please include the date(s) of the event, where it is held and who to contact for more information. If submitting a volunteer proposal, please try to include a list of days and times people are needed.

Doug is thanking everyone in advance for your suggestions

Barre Chapter Meets Thursday, April 2!

VSEA's Barre Chapter is meeting Thursday, April 2, at the Quarry Restaurant, 210 North Main St. in Barre, beginning at 5:00 p.m. This is an important meeting because the Chapter will be electing a president.

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 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.

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

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

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

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.

Upcoming Meetings/Events/Holidays:

March 30

Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update Meeting
Agriculture Building
Room 210
Montpelier
Noon

March 31

Advanced Steward Training: Stewards And Labor/Management Committees
Vtrans Training Center
1716 U.S. Rte. 302
Berlin
9:00 a.m.

March 31

VSCSF Executive Board Meeting
VSEA HQ
Montpelier
9:00 a.m.

April 1

FMCS Labor/Management Training For NMU & DHR
VSEA HQ
Montpelier
9:00 a.m.

April 2

Barre Chapter Meeting
Quarry Restaurant
Barre
5:00 p.m.

April 3

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

April 3

Council Member Training: Southwest Vermont
Asa Bloomer Building
Fourth Floor Conference Room
Rutland
9:30 a.m.