

# WEEK IN ACTION!

Weekly News From Your Union ~ March 2, 2014 – March 6, 2015

## **AOT Member's Letter To Editor Speaks For Thousands Of State Employees**

**This letter to the editor of the *Rutland Herald* appeared in the paper on March 3. It was written by Ed Olsen, an AOT employee working out of the Mendon Garage.**

To The State:

I am a hard-working Vermont state employee for the Agency of Transportation (District 3). I plow the roads. Us plow drivers get up, as needed, at 3 a.m. (sometimes working seven days a week) to make sure our roads are safe so Vermonters (including yourself) can go to work and so everyone's kids can get to school.

That said, I see and read the things you and the Legislature are proposing, and I very much disapprove. You ask for pay cuts and threaten to lay off 450 working-class people if we do not open the contract, which we negotiated with you in good faith. You refuse to balance the budget by raising taxes on the wealthy and instead want to take money out of my pocket to cover your failures. You want me and other plow drivers to open our contracts and give back the 2.5 percent pay raise we all agreed to.

I make just over \$17 an hour, while the average wage of a plow driver is \$38,000 a year. Yet you have made it clear that you will not tax the wealthy who can afford it to cover the budget gap that you created. But I do not expect you to necessarily understand the hardships you are asking us to suffer. Maybe you don't understand that taking \$36 a paycheck out of my wages (which on average you are proposing for all plow drivers) is the difference between making or missing a mortgage payment, a utility bill or buying a pair of shoes for the kids. Maybe you also don't understand how hard we work for the modest pay we receive.

Therefore, I invite you to shadow my job as an AOT snowplow truck driver through just one storm. Otherwise, I look forward to remembering who stood with and against working-class Vermonters.

Ed Olsen  
Proctor

### Letter Sparks New *VTDigger* Ads

Based on the very positive response to Ed's letter on [VSEA's Facebook page](#), VSEA decided this week to bring his words to an even broader audience of Vermonters, posting new ads on *VTDigger* that steer viewers to the letter and to a pitch to support and promote [VSEA's revenue-generating plan](#).

"So many members are telling me how much they can relate to the points Ed Olsen is making in his letter," says VSEA President Shelley Martin. "His words are really resonating, not only with VSEA members, but with working Vermonters as a whole, I think. More Vermonters need to hear what Ed is saying, and *VTDigger* is a good vehicle to expand the letter's reach.

[Click here to view VSEA information page that ad links to from \*Digger\*.](#)

***Ed Note: VSEA member Lorri LePage also shared a letter to the editor that she recently submitted to the Barton Chronicle. It's excellent, and members can read it [by clicking here](#). Thanks Lorri.***

## **VSEA Members Urged To Support Community High School Of Vermont On March 10 “Day Of Action”**

Community High School of Vermont educators are returning to the State House on Tuesday, March 10, to testify in front the House Education Committee, where they will continue to make the educators’ case not to severely cut the program’s funding and urge lawmakers to help them ensure the program is being fully utilized.

**VSEA members are urged to call the Sergeant At Arms (802-828-2228) on March 10 and deliver this simple message to your lawmakers, both Senate and House: “I am one of your constituents. No cuts to the Community High School of Vermont. Thank you.”**

[Click here to identify your local lawmakers](#)

Click here to download a worksite flyer about the “CHSVT Day of Action”

## **House Appropriations Committee Schedules March 12 Public Hearing On State’s Proposed Draconian Cuts To Fill New \$18 Million Budget Hole**

Adding to Vermont’s well-documented fiscal woes was the recent news from economists that the state was adding \$18 million to its deficit. In response to the announcement, the State prepared a new list of potential cuts that includes some very draconian ideas like privatizing the Vermont Veterans’ Home, closing the Windsor correctional facility, closing state parks and lands, a fee for state employees to park, eliminating VOSHA, reducing the number of game wardens and eliminating the Women’s Commission.

The House Appropriations Committee has scheduled a public hearing to hear from Vermonters about these proposals ([click here to view the full list](#)). **It’s being held at 1:00 p.m., Thursday, March 12, in Room 11 at the State House in Montpelier.** The Committee is mandating that testimony be limited to just the cuts being proposed to fill the newly identified \$18 budget hole.

“VSEA is urging our members working at the Vets’ Home, in Forests and Parks, Corrections or any of the other agencies or departments being targeted on this list to make time to testify or please submit testimony in advance to the committee,” says VSEA President Shelley Martin. “Given the draconian nature of these cuts, this debate is unfortunately becoming more of a call to arms to Vermonters to rise up to protect our way of life and reemphasize what we all value as a society.”

If you would like to submit testimony in advance, send it to Theresa Utton-Jerman at [tutton@leg.state.vt.us](mailto:tutton@leg.state.vt.us)

## **Legislature’s Working Vermonters’ Caucus Sends Letter To State, Denouncing Cuts**

**VSEA issued a press release on March 4, praising the legislature’s “Working Vermonters’ Caucus” for penning a letter to the State on March 2 that asks it to raise revenue and not cut services and jobs. The release read:**

Vermont State Employees Association (VSEA) President Shelley Martin says the union is welcoming a letter penned recently to the State by the legislature’s “Working Vermonters’ Caucus,” opposing its budget-reduction proposals that directly impact state employees.

The letter begins:

*“The members of the Working Vermonters’ Caucus strongly oppose the proposals in the [State]’s budget that specifically target state employees, who are middle-class Vermonters, and the Vermonters they serve. Specifically, we are opposed to a budget proposal that includes any of the following:*

- *A tax solely on state employees;*
- *A lack of adequate funding for the Pay Act;*
- *The consolidation of Public Safety Answering Points;*
- *The privatization of the Vermont Veterans’ Home;*
- *The degradation of the Community High School of Vermont program; or*
- *Further cuts to the Judiciary.*

It ends:

*“We believe Vermont’s economy has recovered in a way that leaves too many working families behind. Wages have not kept pace for low- and middle-income families. Median household wages have fallen. This has a negative impact on state revenues and creates pressure to cut budgets and services. We are concerned that austerity measures only further hurt the very people who our economy is leaving behind. We support generating new revenue from the wealthiest Vermonters to prevent these cuts.”*

“VSEA members genuinely appreciate this influential group of lawmakers taking the lead to help state employees impress upon the [State] how detrimental [its] proposed budget cuts will be to thousands of working, middle-class Vermonters,” says Martin. “We will be working with these lawmakers to promote VSEA’s plan to generate new revenue, which we believe, if adopted, will help Vermont regain solid financial footing without having to further decimate our state’s quality public services. VSEA thanks these lawmakers for their courage and for stepping up big time to advocate for their state employee constituents and the services we provide.”

## **[VSEA Posts New Videos To Highlight State’s Changed Attitude Towards State Employees](#)**

VSEA posted a couple of videos to its Facebook page this week that the union says highlight how much the State’s attitude towards state employees has seemingly changed for the worse since 2009. [One video features the State’s top official telling caregivers and veterans in 2013](#) how strongly the State supports the Vermont Veterans’ Home and opposes privatization and then delivering the same message again in 2014 to state employees attending VSEA’s Annual Meeting. Today, the Administration’s message has changed dramatically and officials are saying publicly that “everything is on the table,” with respect to the Vets’ Home, including privatization and closure.

[The other video is then-Senate Pro Tem addressing a 2009 VSEA rally](#) on the State House steps with strong words denouncing the Douglas Administration’s 660 proposed job cuts and kind words for the “sacrifices” state employees made during the peak of Vermont’s recession. Here too, the State’s message has completely changed from then to now, with proposals for a special tax solely on state employees and anywhere from 100-450 job cuts.

## **[VSEA Schedules Fight Back Campaign Phase II Update Meetings](#)**

Beginning this week, VSEA leaders and organizers began hosting a series of meetings in worksites across Vermont to begin educating members about phase II 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 10

CCV  
Room 1521  
Newport  
11:30 a.m.

March 10

Chittenden Chapter Meeting  
Includes Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update

March 11

Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update Meeting  
Tax Dept., Room 410  
133 State St.  
Montpelier  
Noon

March 11

Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update Meeting  
National Life  
Davis Building, Sixth Floor  
Calvin Coolidge Conference Room  
Montpelier  
Noon

March 11

Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update Meeting  
State Office Building  
First Floor Conference Room  
27 Federal St.  
St. Albans  
Noon

March 12

Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update Meeting  
City Place  
DCF Conference Room  
Barre  
11:30 a.m.

March 12

Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update Meeting  
Castleton State College  
Castleton  
Noon

March 14

Special Bylaws Meeting: Judiciary Unit  
11:00 a.m./Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update

## **Chittenden Chapter Meeting Is Tuesday, March 10!**

The Chittenden Chapter's next meeting is 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. Chittenden Chapter President Kara Haynes hopes to see you there! A portion of this meeting will be devoted to a discussion of the next phase of the VSEA Fight Back campaign.

## **Attorneys And Court Officials Statewide Warning About Adverse Impact Of Proposed Cuts**

State employees working in the Executive Branch of Vermont government aren't the only public employees openly worrying about the negative impact the State's proposed cuts. *VTDigger* reports on March 4 that attorneys and Court officials working statewide in the Judiciary Branch are publicly warning that if the State's proposed cuts to the Judiciary are adopted, it will become even harder "for Vermonters to have their day in court," as the current backlog of cases grows even more.

"Of course the Supreme Court and Judiciary are very concerned about access to justice," explains Court Administrator Patricia Gabel. "All parties are entitled to a timely hearing for their cases."

Concern about the proposed cuts to the Judiciary prompted the Vermont Association of Justice (VTAJ) to send a letter last month to lawmakers, voicing the group's worries about adding to an already existing case backlog. "As a result of increasing caseloads in all courts, civil matters suffer disproportionately," wrote the VTAJ. "While abuse and other cases take priority, civil cases remain unresolved." The VTAJ also warns that, under current conditions, it will likely take clients 18 to 26 months before a judge hears a two-day civil jury trial, and it may take as long as four months to schedule a three-hour-long case. "That's a real problem for people who've been injured, who need a divorce, or need to modify a custody arrangement with their kids," explains VTAJ president Christopher Larson.

The potential adverse impact of the State's proposed cuts to Judiciary employees is not referenced in the *Digger* story, as the State did not specifically designate how the savings requested are to be found. Even so, VSEA's Judiciary members remain vigilant and are keeping in communication with each other about what they are hearing. As a supplement to their preparations, VSEA is offering these members a special Fight Back campaign update on Saturday, March 14, as part of the Unit's special meeting to address bylaw revisions.

"VSEA's Judiciary workers are just a few years removed from mandatory furlough days that cost each worker approximately 4.25 percent of their pay for the duration—and many employees are still trying to rebound from that," VSEA President Shelley Martin tells *WIA*. "Like the attorneys and Court officials, VSEA's Judiciary members are very concerned about how additional cuts will degrade their services even more. They agree that Vermonters using our state's court system deserve timely hearings and adequately staffed courtrooms. We'll be working hard with the Judiciary Unit to stop these cuts."

## **Another State Opts To Raise Revenue, And It's Alabama?**

*WIA* told you last week about how the Governor of Minnesota was able to erase his state's \$2.6 billion budget deficit by implementing a series of revenue-generating measures, including asking those with the means to pay 2% more. Well, the Governor of Alabama must have been listening because, this week, in his State-of-the-State address, Gov. Robert Bentley promoted his revenue-generating proposals, telling lawmakers, "Revenue must increase. There must be growth money in in the state's General Fund." Bentley is on the defensive because he ran on a pledge of no new taxes, but he's not letting pride get in his way. "We cannot put off these problems any more," he said. "We cannot cut our way out of this."

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

***VSEA Labor Educator Tim Lenocho 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 Lenocho by email at [tlenoch@vsea.org](mailto:tlenoch@vsea.org), or by phone at 2223-5247.

## **VSEA Insurance Representative In Barre On March 10 & 11**

VSEA Insurance Representative Joanne Woodcock will be in the McFarland State Office Building's ground floor on March 10 and 11 from noon to 3:00 p.m. to talk with interested VSEA members about member-only insurance benefits.

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.

## **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.

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

#### **March 10**

Child & Elder Care Committee Meeting  
VSEA HQ  
Montpelier  
9:30 a.m.

#### **March 10**

Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update Meeting  
CCV  
Room 1521  
Newport  
11:30 a.m.

#### **March 10**

Chittenden Chapter Meeting  
DVHA  
312 Hurricane Lane  
Williston  
5:30 p.m.  
**Note: includes Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update**

#### **March 11**

Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update Meeting  
Tax Dept., Room 410  
133 State St.  
Montpelier  
Noon



**March 11**

Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update Meeting  
National Life  
Davis Building, Sixth Floor  
Calvin Coolidge Conference Room  
Montpelier  
Noon

**March 11**

Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update Meeting  
State Office Building  
First Floor Conference Room  
27 Federal St.  
St. Albans  
Noon

**March 12**

Chapter Presidents Committee Meeting  
VSEA HQ  
Montpelier  
9:00 a.m.

**March 12**

Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update Meeting  
City Place  
DCF Conference Room  
Barre  
11:30 a.m.

**March 12**

Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update Meeting  
Castleton State College  
Castleton  
Noon

**March 12**

House Appropriations Committee Public Hearing On Proposed Cuts To Fill New \$18 Million Budget Hole  
Room 11, State House  
Montpelier

**March 14**

Special Bylaws Meeting: Judiciary Unit  
VSEA HQ  
Montpelier  
Noon

**Note: 11:00 a.m./Fight Back Campaign: Phase II Update**