



## WEEK IN ACTION!

Weekly News From Your Union ~ April 6, 2015 – April 10, 2015

### **President Martin Says Yesterday's Memo From State Reinforces Why VSEA Is Rallying Tomorrow!**

Late yesterday, VSEA President Shelley Martin sent an important message to all members, informing you about a memo your union had received from the State. Hopefully, you had a chance to read the message and you have an understanding now that the State has decided to essentially abandon weeks of informal and productive discussions about \$10-plus-million in alternative, non-contractual savings in favor of asking VSEA members again to open your contracts and agree to wage and benefit cuts and other givebacks. As Martin wrote last night, VSEA wasted no time informing the State that a contract re-opener wasn't going to happen.

“The State’s memo is a harsh reminder of why tomorrow’s rally at the State House is so important and why I hope every state employee who can will be there,” Martin tells *WIA*. “It’s important that we send a strong and united message that there are alternatives to cuts and that it’s time to stop the assault on Vermont’s working middle class.”

Oddly, the State’s memo somehow found its way into the hands of a *Times Argus* reporter, even in advance of some VSEA leaders receiving it. [Here’s what the \*Argus\* ended up writing about the memo and VSEA’s response.](#)

Read the State’s memo and VSEA’s response here.

### **See You At The Fight Back Rally!**

**Tomorrow! April 11  
State House Steps  
Montpelier  
Noon**

At long last, rally day is here!

Tomorrow (Saturday, April 11) VSEA and more than a dozen co-sponsoring organizations are holding a “Fight Back” rally at the State House in Montpelier. The rally begins at noon and will be followed by a “stop the cuts, raise revenue” march through downtown Montpelier, featuring live bands. On the rally grounds, there will be music and food.

VSEA is pleased to announce that one of the rally’s featured speakers will be AOT worker Ed Olsen, who you might remember recently wrote a well-publicized letter to the State’s top official, demanding an end to asking state employees to constantly give back. Additional speakers will represent teachers and other working Vermonters, as well as the disabled and faith communities. VSEA First Vice President Michelle Salvador will serve as one of the rally’s master of ceremonies.

We’ll see you at the rally!

## **VSEA President Pens Pre-Rally Commentary!**

*The Rutland Herald published the following commentary by VSEA President Shelley Martin on April 8:*

This Saturday, members of the Vermont State Employees' Association will be joined by working Vermonters from across our state to send a strong, united message to Montpelier that it is time for a new approach to solving Vermont's perpetual budget deficits.

We will be letting [the State] and lawmakers know that the days of relying on hard-working, largely middle-class state employees to continue to rescue Vermont from fiscal crises not of our making are over. So, too, are the days of asking a growing (not shrinking) number of Vermonters in need to make do with pared-down services and a reduced number of frontline employees.

All too often, some of our leaders forget that state employees are middle-class taxpayers, too. Furthermore, throughout our state's repeated recessions, we've had several special "taxes" imposed just on us. These came in the form of wage cuts, step freezes, mandated furlough days and increased employee contributions to both our pension and health care plans. Now, Vermont's facing yet another substantial budget deficit, and what do our leaders want? Another special tax targeting state employees. We are being asked to give back a wage increase that the governor himself just negotiated last year with VSEA members in good faith. But VSEA members are fighting back because we know that at the same time we, Vermont workers, are being asked to surrender more of our take-home pay, our state's wealthiest citizens are enjoying some of the top income growth in the United States.

It's true. A recent study found that from 2009 to 2013 (all years featuring a budget deficit) Vermont's wealthiest households saw their income rise by 3 percent, which was the sixth largest increase in the nation. However, during the same period, working, middle-class Vermonters watched our household incomes drop by a staggering 6 percent. This was a key factor in another recent study's finding that Vermont's working, middle class is "dying" at a faster rate than in 48 other states. Is this really a path Vermont leaders want to continue down? VSEA members think not, which is why we continue to work to convince officials and lawmakers to prevent more cuts by adopting one or more of the revenue-generating ideas VSEA members proposed early in this legislative session. With a small increase to the cost of an overnight hotel stay, or a small change to the way we tax capital gains, we can avoid cuts not only to positions but also to critical services benefiting the blind, disabled and elderly.

A recent statement issued by Vermont's own Public Assets Institute supports VSEA members' assertion that capacity exists for Vermont's wealthiest to pay a little more to help our state. They write: "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."

If you're a working Vermonter who agrees with VSEA, Public Assets and our supporters about the need for Vermont's leaders to stop the public service and job cuts and instead explore alternative methods to generate new revenue, then please rally with us at noon on Saturday, April 11, at the State House in Montpelier. Stand with other working Vermonters in solidarity and help us send a message that it's time to stop relying on a cuts-heavy strategy to resolve our state's ongoing budget deficits. It's a failed approach that hurts Vermonters in need and hurts the thousands of men and women who provide daily services to them. Vermont's leaders can, and must, do better.

## **Send An Online “Fight Back” Postcard To Your Legislators**

VSEA organizers and activists recently wrapped up Fight Back campaign phase two meetings in worksites across Vermont, updating members on efforts to change the debate in Montpelier from cutting services and jobs to generating new revenue. Part of each meeting was devoted to members filling out personal message postcards to be hand delivered to their lawmakers in Montpelier. Recently, [VSEA posted an online version of the postcard](#), and members are urged to take a few minutes to fill out one or more and hit send. VSEA Legislative staff will then ensure your online postcard(s) reaches its intended lawmaker(s). Thanks in advance for the help.

The next phase of your union’s Fight Back campaign will commence immediately following the conclusion of Saturday’s rally. Keep an eye on *WIA* for a schedule of upcoming worksite meetings.

## **Article Provides Good Perspective On Why VSEA Members Are Fighting**

An great article that summarizes why VSEA members are fighting back against the State’s budget demands posted on VT Digger this week. It’s worth a read. [Click here](#).

## **Senate Appropriations Committee Hears From Frontline VSEA Members**

Vermont’s budget debate officially switched legislative bodies this week, as the Senate began analyzing, and amending the House’s proposed budget. As part of the process, the powerful Senate Appropriations Committee took public testimony on April 7, mostly from Vermonters, including several VSEA members, who are opposed to more service and position cuts.

VSEA ANR member Kelly Merrill invoked FDR in her testimony that called on the State and lawmakers to respect the collective bargaining process by not asking employees to reopen contracts. “FDR said that it is a fundamental right for of a worker to associate himself with other workers and to bargain collectively with his employer,” reminded Merrill. “Ten months ago, my employer, the [State], agreed to a contract... a contract made in good faith with the its worker, myself. Now my employer wants out of the contract. The better way is to stand by the agreement made and raise the revenue from those who can most afford it.” Merrill then injected FDR’s words again, reciting to the Committee, “Taxes shall be levied according to ability to pay. That is the only American principle.”

Merrill also called on the Committee to model FDR by launching a “new deal” right here in Vermont, explaining that the budget situation provides an avenue to make it happen. “Raise the revenue needed to provide necessary services and achieve important goals for the state. Vermont statute says ‘The state budget shall be designed to address the needs of the people of Vermont in a away that advances human dignity and equity.’ It’s time for Vermont state government to assume a greater responsibility for the state’s well being, not by cutting government services but by growing them like FDR did. FDR’s new deal involved social programs to aid the unemployed and elderly. It didn’t create more unemployed. It didn’t reduce the government workforce serving the elderly.” Merrill also referenced the sacrifices her grandfather made (largely during FDR’s era) to ensure working people had a right to earn a fair wage and to decent working conditions.

Community High School of Vermont (CHSVT) Educator John Vorder Bruegge also testified to the Committee about the important work being done where he works.

“The CHSVT should not have its budget cut, since CHSVT is an under-utilized resource crucial to the effort to reduce recidivism in the Green Mountain State,” said Vorder Bruegge. “At the February 27 House Corrections and Institutions Committee hearing, CHSVT staff provided reorganization ideas aimed at saving approximately \$1.1 million in the Vermont Department of Corrections’ budget without ANY of the cuts proposed by the Commissioner. There may be even greater savings possible if services currently handled by contractors are instead provided by CHSVT staff.” He concluded with, “Do our elected officials mean to ignore the reality that correctional education cuts recidivism and lowers the

cost of recidivism for all Vermonters? CHSVT and the work we do better prepares offenders for future success in careers and in their communities. Is there any other program provided by DOC that does more to cut recidivism, and to make the Green Mountain State safer for us all?

911 Emergency Dispatcher and anti-consolidation champion Patricia Bennett returned to the State House to take her turn in front of the Senate committee. Bennett used her time to educate the Committee about the costs and time required to train new dispatchers, and she laid out the overtime costs DPS could incur with consolidation. She also provided the Committee with several options to save the 911 Dispatch Centers some money, from a surcharge on traffic tickets to having AOT plow the barracks in the winter.

VSEA is thanking every VSEA member and retiree who attended the hearing and especially those who testified. *WIA* will keep readers updated on the Senate budget debate as it continues to evolve.

### **Attention VSEA Non-Management Unit Members!**

The following is a message from Non-Management Unit Chair Bob Stone:

Good afternoon VSEA NMU members. I have two important announcements this week to share with you:

- First: The deadline to complete the NMU survey is next week, close of business, April 15. The responses we've received to date from hundreds of NMU members are already proving to be valuable, and I personally thank all of you who have taken time to complete this important survey. If you haven't had a chance to take the survey yet, please take some time between now and next Friday to do so. You can find the NMU survey [here](#).
- Second: The NMU Bargaining Team is actively soliciting your contract proposals for consideration. If you have a proposal, please email it to the Team at [nbargaining@vsea.org](mailto:nbargaining@vsea.org). You can also contact any NMU Bargaining Team member ([see list here](#)). The deadline to submit your proposal(s) is April 23, 2015.

### **NMU Bargaining Team To Review Personnel Implications Of Proposed PSAP Consolidation**

#### **From the Team:**

“The NMU Bargaining Team recently received an initial draft proposal, outlining the personnel implications of the potential consolidation of the PSAPs. The NMU Bargaining Team will be reviewing this draft proposal at its next regularly scheduled meeting on April 24 to ensure that, if the consolidation does occur, our members are well protected. Should members have individual questions or input for the NMU Bargaining Team, please email [nbargaining@vsea.org](mailto:nbargaining@vsea.org).”

In Solidarity,

Bob Stone, NMU Chair

Tracey Harrington, NMU Vice-Chair

## **New Week Means Another Great “Fight Back” Letter To The Editor**

VSEA member and Community High School of Vermont Educator John W. Vorder Bruegge shared a letter this week with *WIA* that was recently published in the *Brattleboro Reformer*.

Here’s an excerpt:

*“The next time you hear [the State] (or anyone else) criticize a labor union or blame Vermont's budget woes on state employee salaries, remember that the working class has been giving - more than its fair share - for much of our working lifetime. It is time for the Vermont Legislature to stand up to income inequality, reject ‘trickle dow’” nonsense, and fill the budget shortfall on the backs of the wealthiest among us, closing loopholes in the Vermont tax code that disproportionately benefit the ‘1 percent,’ maybe even, increasing taxes on those who have benefited the most from the last three decades of income inequality.*

To read John’s full letter, please [click here](#).

## **Delta Dental Supplemental Plan Enrollment Forms In Mail Mid-April**

VSEA members wanting to join Delta Dental’s Supplemental Program should keep an eye open for new enrollment forms, which will begin arriving in all eligible VSEA members’ home mailboxes in mid-April. The deadline to return your enrollment form will be May 13, 2015. Premium deductions from employee paychecks will begin in early June. The Supplemental Program’s new contract year begins July 1, 2015, and ends June 20, 2016.

VSEA members who already belong to the Supplemental Program will not be required to re-enroll. VSEA members who wish to leave the Program will be able to do so, using the enrollment forms that are coming in the mail.

***Note: The new enrollment forms will only be made available via the mid-April mailing. The forms will not be posted on VSEA’s website.***

## **Central Vermont Chapter Meeting On Monday**

VSEA’s Central Vermont Chapter is meeting Monday, April 13 at noon in room 410 at 133 State Street in Montpelier. Newly elected Chapter President Cassandra Edson and others will be discussing VSEA’s Fight Back campaign and other issues, such as parking.

## **New Public Assets’ Report Finds Vermont Has A Revenue—Not Spending-- Problem**

At the same time VSEA members are proposing that the State and lawmakers generate new revenue to address our state’s current budget deficit, Vermont’s own Public Assets’ Institute published a new report this week that agrees with VSEA’s approach.

From Public Assets’ report announcement:

*“All we’ve heard from Montpelier this year...is that Vermont has a spending problem, not a revenue problem. A new analysis by the Joint Fiscal Office (JFO) shows this conventional wisdom is wrong.*

*The JFO data show state spending has gone down as a percentage of the economy over the last 10 years.*

*Vermont’s gross state product—the sum of all the goods and services produced and sold—is growing again. We are essentially tied with Massachusetts for having the fastest growing economy in New*

*England since the bottom of the recession in 2009. That's good news.*

*But the state's revenues—taxes, fees, fines, and the like—aren't keeping pace with Vermont's economic growth. And because the administration and the Legislature are more inclined to match spending to available revenues despite a growing need for services, they have chosen to cut services to close the state's budget gap.*

*It's not clear why revenues are lagging, although suggestions in a 2011 study that Vermont expand the sales tax to include services and reform the income tax might be part of the solution. But since revenues aren't keeping up with economic growth, lawmakers need to focus on fixing that problem rather than cut critically needed state services.”*

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

## **VSEA Members Can Now Use Express Scripts' Card For Pharmacy Inoculations!**

VSEA Benefits Advisory Committeeperson Sheila Coniff asked *WIA* to let active VSEA members know that, as of March 1, you are now able to use your Express Scripts' card at your local pharmacy to receive inoculations to help prevent illnesses like influenza and pneumonia. There is a \$0 co-pay.

For VSEA retirees, Medicare covers your influenza and pneumonia shots, but Express Scripts will cover your shingles inoculations. There is also a \$0 co-pay.

## **NMU Sick Leave Bank Nears Bankruptcy! Please Donate Today!**

The Department of Human Resources (DHR) asked VSEA to help spread the word that the Non-Management Unit's Sick Leave Bank is teetering on the brink of bankruptcy and help is desperately needed.

“Just donating an hour of your time can mean the world to a fellow employee,” read a flyer DHR sent out last week. It also informs state employees that from April 1 to June 30, 2015, they can donate any amount of time to the NMU Sick Leave Bank. “Know that you are performing a wonderful service by helping your friends and fellow employees, who, along with their families, are struggling due to serious health issues,” the flyer concludes.

VSEA members interested in donating some much-needed time to the NMU Sick Leave Bank can find a donation form [here](#).

“I want to thank every member for considering a donation to this important fund,” VSEA President Shelley Martin tells *WIA*. “Even if you only donate one hour to the bank, these one-hour donations add up. You can feel good, knowing your donation is going to help a fellow state employee who is battling a serious illness.”



## **Capital Commuters Asking State Employee Users To Complete Survey**

The Vermont Capital Commuters Program was created in July 2013 to help improve parking conditions in Montpelier for state employees by promoting efficient, affordable commuting options. To date, more than 500 state employees have enrolled in the program, and now the program wants your feedback on the service, via [an online survey](#).

“Please ask your members, whether they in the program, or not, to take a few minutes to answer some simple survey questions,” program administrators wrote. “Their individual responses will be confidential, summarized and reported as a group. Your input will help us achieve our goal to improve commuter choices.”

All members who complete the survey will become eligible to win a \$50 Shaw’s gift certificate.

To learn more about the Capital Commuters program, please [click here](#).

## **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](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.*

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

### **April 11**

VSEA Fight Back Rally  
State House  
Montpelier  
Noon

### **April 13**

Legislative Committee Meeting  
VSEA HQ  
Montpelier  
8:00 a.m.

### **April 13**

Central Vermont Chapter Meeting  
Tax Department, Room 410  
133 State St.  
Montpelier  
Noon

### **April 14**

Corrections Unit Bargaining Team Meeting  
VSEA HQ  
Montpelier  
9:00 a.m.

### **April 14**

Steward Training 2: Protecting The Contract & Building The Union  
VTrans Training Center  
1716 U.S. Rte. 302  
Berlin  
9:30 a.m.

### **April 14**

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

### **April 16**

Judiciary Unit Labor/Management Committee Meeting  
VSEA HQ  
Montpelier  
9:00 a.m.

### **April 16**

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



**April 17**

Budget Committee Meeting

VSEA HQ

Montpelier

9:00 a.m.

**April 17**

Council Member Training: NW Vermont

DVHA

Room 201

312 Hurricane Lane

Williston

9:30 a.m.