



## WEEK IN ACTION!

Weekly News From Your Union ~ April 20, 2015 – April 24, 2015

### Secretary Of The Administration Says RIFs Could Now Number Under 50!

In budget testimony on Thursday to the House Appropriations Committee, Secretary of the Administration Justin Johnson dramatically and unexpectedly lowered the number of RIFs the State is now saying it will need (in lieu of a contract re-opener) from 400-plus potential RIFs to less than 50.

[According to an April 23 post by \*Seven Days\*' political columnist Paul Heintz](#), "Johnson told the committee he expects to eliminate 300 positions through retirements, vacancies and involuntary reductions-in-force. But, he said, 'I think that the RIFs are gonna ultimately be a relatively small part of that.'"

In an interview with Heintz following his testimony, Johnson elaborated on the 50 RIF number, saying, "I don't think it would be any higher than 50. It's likely somewhat less than that. It really ultimately just comes down in the end to how many folks, how many programs have to use RIFs as opposed to vacancies."

VSEA Executive Director Steve Howard also comments in the story, reminding that VSEA members have been collecting and bringing non-contractual cost-savings ideas to the State in hopes their ideas could prevent the need for service and job cuts.

"We're gratified that the ideas our members have brought forward have been accepted by the Administration, grateful for their cooperation, and we're glad that it's minimizing and potentially eliminating RIFs as a possibility," Howard says. "We will fight until every single job is protected."

### State Divulges Possible Retirement Incentive In Testimony

In testimony to the Senate Appropriations Committee this week, Secretary of the Administration Justin Johnson informed lawmakers that the State is considering offering a "retirement incentive" to eligible employees which he estimates will save Vermont \$2.5 million, on top of the \$2 million in non-contractual savings VSEA has already provided to the State. [VT Digger was in the room and reported on Johnson's testimony](#), writing that the details are still being worked out with the Treasurer's Office and that it's still difficult to tell what the possible impact will be on certain departments and agencies as a result.

VSEA Policy Analyst Adam Norton shared his understanding of the State's retirement incentive with *WIA*. He says:

- The State's "voluntary retirement incentive" will be offered only to employees who are already retirement eligible. Fearing adverse impact to the State Employee Pension Fund, the State Treasurer has been clear that she's not interested in offering an incentive to employees who are not already eligible to retire;
- Most employees who accept the incentive will begin their retirement in October 2015, however some employees will be permitted to continue working a few extra months to finish ongoing projects. An October start date grants employees (once VSEA is provided the specifics) a few months to decide whether they're interested in the incentive; and
- The "incentive" will probably look like the one the State offered employees in 2010, which was a cash buyout ranging from \$10,000 to \$15,000, paid out over two years. The actual specifics of the incentive are still being worked on by the State and Treasurer's Office.

*WIA* will continue to publish updates on the incentive as it evolves, and members should keep an eye on VSEA email updates as well.

## **June 1 Petition Deadline For Four VSEA Elected Offices!**

This is a busy election year for VSEA, with all of the union's top officer slots up for election, as well as several seats on VSEA's Board of Trustees.

There is a June 1, 2015, petition deadline for VSEA members wishing to run for any one of the following:

- Non-Management Unit Trustee;
- Judicial Unit Trustee;
- District #3 (Newport/Island Pond, Lamoille County, Northeast Kingdom and St. Johnsbury)
- District #6 (White River Junction/Springfield/Brattleboro)

VSEA members interested in running for one of the four seats above can find a filing petition by [clicking here](#).

Petitions to run for one of VSEA's five top elected official seats are not due until 60 calendar days prior to the union's Annual Meeting on September 12. That would be Tuesday, July 14, 2015. These petitions will be available online very soon.

## **VSEA Wants To Hear From Members With A Domestic Partner Covered By Member's Health Plan**

Last week, *WIA* told readers how upset VSEA members were after learning that the Chairs of the House Appropriations and Government Operations Committees had penned a joint letter to the State that attacks seven hard-won and key provisions of VSEA members' contracts. One of the uninvited suggestions the lawmakers propose is "the elimination of domestic partners from the types of dependents eligible for coverage under the State Employee Health Plan."

"VSEA wants to hear right now from members whose domestic partners are currently covered under our Health Plan," says VSEA President Shelley Martin. "We'd like to be able to share the potential impact of a move like this with the relevant lawmakers."

Martin is asking VSEA members with a domestic partner who currently receives the member's health care benefits to please contact VSEA Legislative Specialist Anne Accettella with your name, contact information and a brief description of how the loss of the domestic partner health care benefit would impact your household.

Send your story to Anne by email to [aaccettella@vsea.org](mailto:aaccettella@vsea.org), or call her at 223-5247.

## **VSEA Members Lead "Truth About Budget Cuts" Panel Discussion**

An important public discussion about the negative impact of service and job cuts took place on Monday, April 20, in Burlington. The forum, which featured four frontline VSEA members as speakers, was sponsored by the Vermont Labor Solidarity Committee and endorsed by VSEA.

VSEA members can be proud of the strong and compelling case these members made to defend services important to Vermonters, like protecting our children, ensuring people can heat their homes, educating offenders and helping them become better citizens and providing people with a timely judicial process and legal help when they need it.

Here's a listing of the night's speakers:

William Wells, ESD, VSEA Member  
Jeanne Smith, Community High of Vermont Educator, VSEA Member  
Shannon Morton, DCF Social Worker, VSEA Member  
Evan Hill, Judiciary, VSEA Member  
Kathy Blume, Environmental Activist  
Mike O'Day, FairPoint, CWA Member  
Jim Fouts, CCTA Bus Driver, Teamster Member

VSEA member John Howe and the ISO's Ashley Smith served as moderators for the discussion. Howe provided the audience with a great overview of the situation facing state employees and some of the revenue remedies VSEA is attempting to convince lawmakers to adopt instead of cuts.

VSEA members can [click here](#) to watch a broadcast of the forum made available by Channel 17 "Town Meeting Television."

## **Senate Shelves Idea To Close Windsor Prison**

This week, the Senate Appropriations Committee thankfully removed language in the House budget bill that proposed a two-year plan to close the Southeast State Correctional Facility in Windsor; a move that would have cost dozens of Vermonters their jobs, displaced 100 inmates and placed additional stress on the state's already overburdened corrections system.

VSEA Corrections Unit Chair Dave Bellini has consistently labeled the idea to close Windsor as "stupid," saying the idea runs contrary to the reality facing Vermont, which is that the state currently has more offenders than it does beds. Bellini adds that the solution that we can simply ship inmates out of state to private, for-profit prison warehouses also runs contrary to Vermont's stated goal with respect to inmate rehabilitation, as the private facilities do not offer near the level of rehabilitation and educational services as Vermont prisons do.

VSEA will continue to monitor the Windsor proposal, as the idea is not dead yet and could be resurrected in future conference committee discussions.

## **VSEA Fight Back Campaign Meetings Underway**

VSEA leaders and organizers returned to worksites last week to begin a new round of meetings to update members about the VSEA's "Fight Back" campaign and what needs to happen now to stop the State from once again cutting services and jobs.

Here is where Fight Back meetings are scheduled for next week:

### Monday, April 27

Fight Back Campaign: Update Meeting  
Whitecap Office  
Conference Room A  
426 Industrial Ave.  
Williston  
12:15 p.m.

### Monday, April 29

Fight Back Campaign: Update Meeting  
DOL  
Lobby Conference Room  
Green Mountain Way  
Montpelier  
Noon

## **New Week Brings Excellent “Fight Back” Letter To The Editor**

VSEA ANR member Kellie Merrell shared a letter this week with *WIA* that was recently published in the *Caledonian Record* on April 21

Here’s an excerpt:

*"According to the Public Assets Institute, a new analysis by Vermont's Joint Fiscal Office (JFO) shows that state spending has gone down as a percentage of the Vermont economy over the last 10 years. Vermont's gross state product is growing again and Vermont ties with Massachusetts for having the fastest growing economy in New England since 2009. Meanwhile, Vermont's revenues aren't keeping pace with Vermont's economic growth. There is a growing need for services in Vermont and cutting services to match revenue doesn't make sense, growing revenue does."*

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

## **Respected Labor Journalist Pens Piece On State’s Struggles With Working Vermonters, Using Single-Payer Health Care Fight As Example**

Well-known and respected national labor journalist Steve Early penned a piece titled [“Union Members Face Multiple Threats In Vermont”](#) that appeared this week on the website Counterpunch, which features “independent, investigative journalism.”

Early primarily focuses his piece on the State’s rocky relationship with workers around the issue of instituting single-payer health care in Vermont, but the writer also cites the State’s recent battle with VSEA and its request for state employees to re-open contracts and balance Vermont’s budget on their backs again.

Talking about VSEA members’ calls to identify new revenue, Early writes, “Neither the Democratic leadership nor the [State] wanted to do that. So [the State] is instead seeking \$8.8 million in state worker concessions, and the Democrat-controlled House has already OKed cuts in social programs like heating assistance for low-income households.”

## **May 6 Bargaining Team Training**

VSEA Labor Relations Director Gary Hoadley asked *WIA* to let all VSEA Bargaining Team members know there will be a comprehensive, all-day bargaining training on Wednesday, May 6, at the Capitol Plaza Hotel in Montpelier, beginning at 9:00 a.m.

Gary asked team members who want to attend to please contact your Bargaining Team Chair to let him or her know. You can find contact information for the Chairs [here](#).

## **May 15 Chapter Officers’ Training Scheduled**

VSEA will host a training for all Chapter Officers (Presidents, Vice Presidents, Clerks, Treasurers) on Friday, May 15, 2015, at the Best Western Hotel in Waterbury. Chapter officers who want to attend the training should RSVP as soon as possible to VSEA Operations Director Ray Stout by email at [rstout@vsea.org](mailto:rstout@vsea.org) or by phone at 223-5247.

## **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.

## **VTrans/ANR Partnership Earns National Recognition**

VSEA is congratulating its AOT and ANR members associated with the “River Science Climate Resiliency Strategy” project on recently receiving an “Environmental Excellence Award” in the area of “Excellence in Climate Change Adaption and Resilience.” The U.S. Department of Transportation’s Federal Highway Administration gives out the award.

The award-winning project pairs AOT employees with ANR river scientists and biologists to work collaboratively on ways to be environmentally responsible when undertaking transportation “operations activities” adjacent to waterways. The project also seeks to jointly design projects so Vermont’s roadway network is less vulnerable to our state’s increasing number of floods.

In an AOT press release about the award, AOT Secretary Sue Minter remarks, “As stewards of our transportation system, we recognize that our roads and bridges need to work in harmony with our waterways. By working with our partners at ANR, we have taken the first steps toward building a stronger, safer system that will also support statewide water quality goals.”

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

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

April 29 & 30  
Disability Determination Services Hearings Room  
93 Pilgrim Park Road  
2<sup>nd</sup> floor  
Waterbury  
12:00 to 3:00

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.

## **Workers Worldwide Observe “Workers’ Memorial Day” On 4/28**

On April 28, workers across the globe will observe “Workers’ Memorial Day,” and pause to remember those who have been injured or killed on the job and renew the fight for strong worker safety and health protections.

Four decades ago, Congress passed the Occupational Safety and Health Act, promising every worker the right to a safe job. Since then, unions and our allies have fought hard to make that promise a reality in Vermont and across the country—winning protections that have made jobs safer, saved hundreds of thousands of lives and prevented millions of workplace injuries and illnesses.

From a national AFL-CIO flyer about Workers' Memorial Day:

*“On April 28, unions nationwide will observe Workers Memorial Day to remember those who have suffered and died on the job and to renew the fight for safe workplaces. This year, we will come together to call for good jobs in this country that are safe and healthy. We will seek stronger safeguards to prevent injuries and save lives. We will stand for the right of all workers to raise job safety concerns without fear of retaliation, and for the freedom to form unions and speak out and bargain for respect and a better future. Please join us and make your voice heard.*”

## **Mark The Date! May Day State House Rally**

Many of the same groups who came out on April 11 to support VSEA members at the union's "Fight Back" rally will be returning to the State House again on May 1 to continue demonstrating against ill-advised state budget cut proposals, the need for new revenue, affordable and accessible health care for all Vermonters and a host of other issues. VSEA has actively participated in this annual event for years.

“I really hope VSEA members who are able will schedule a few hours of leave, or use your lunch break, to attend this important May Day rally,” VSEA President Shelley Martin tells *WIA*. “Another opportunity to tell lawmakers and officials that working, middle-class Vermonters are not going to take this anymore.”

The Vermont Workers' Center is again sponsoring the May Day Rally, and here is some of how they are billing it:

*“We're at a crossroads. But rather than choosing the path towards human rights and dignity, [the State] and many legislators are pushing an austerity agenda based on cutting public services for people with disabilities and attacking state workers and teachers. Instead of raising revenue equitably to meet the needs in our communities, those in power have abandoned the path towards publicly-financed healthcare...”*

[Click here to learn more about the May Day Rally.](#)

## **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.***

## **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 27**

Fight Back Campaign: Update Meeting  
Whitecap Office  
Conference Room A  
426 Industrial Ave.  
Williston  
12:15 p.m.

### **April 28**

Training: Steward 3: The Contract & Challenges In The Workplace  
VTrans Training Center  
1716 U.S. Rte. 302  
Berlin  
9:00 a.m.

### **April 28**

Workers' Memorial Day  
International Commemoration

### **April 29**

Fight Back Campaign: Update Meeting  
DOL  
Lobby Conference Room  
Green Mountain Way  
Montpelier  
Noon

### **April 29**

Meet w/ VSEA Insurance Representative Joanne Woodcock  
Disability Determination Services Hearings Room  
93 Pilgrim Park Road  
2<sup>nd</sup> floor  
Waterbury  
Noon

### **April 30**

Advanced Training: Investigations & Working With DHR  
DVHA  
Room 201  
312 Hurricane Lane  
Williston  
9:00 a.m.

### **April 29**



Meet w/ VSEA Insurance Representative Joanne Woodcock  
Disability Determination Services Hearings Room  
93 Pilgrim Park Road  
2<sup>nd</sup> floor  
Waterbury  
Noon