



## WEEK IN ACTION!

Weekly News From Your Union ~ March 30, 2015 – April 3, 2015

### **VT Senate Appropriations Committee Holding Public Hearing On Budget!**

**Tuesday, April 7**  
**State House, Room 10**  
**Montpelier**  
**1:30 p.m.**

The VT Senate's Appropriations' Committee is taking public comment on FY2016 budget proposals. This is a great opportunity for VSEA frontline workers to weigh in against proposed service and job cuts, as well as lobby Senators to find new revenue and to seriously address the underlying reasons why Vermont's economy is not recovering.

To make the best use of the limited time allotted for comment, VSEA Legislative Specialist Anne Accettella is asking members interested in testifying to please drop her a short note in advance, summarizing what you would like to address. You can also email any questions to Anne at [aaccettella@vsea.org](mailto:aaccettella@vsea.org).

VSEA members can sign up to testify in advance by contacting Becky Buck at [rbuck@leg.state.vt.us](mailto:rbuck@leg.state.vt.us). If you can't attend, you can also draft testimony for the committee and submit to Ms. Buck.

### **VSEA Fight Back Rally Fever...Catch It Today!**

Rally momentum continues to build. This week, more than a dozen labor unions, community and environmental organizations and even a political party signed on to co-sponsor the VSEA Fight Back Rally, being held noon, Saturday, April 11, at the State House in Montpelier. The rally is a chance for state employees to come together with supporters to send a strong message to Montpelier that more cuts to services and good-paying, middle-class jobs is a failed approach that doesn't produce savings and only hurts Vermonters in need.

**In advance of the rally, VSEA members and retirees are conducting three phone banks next week to personally invite more VSEA members to join them at the Fight Back Rally.**

- **Tuesday, April 7 – Burlington, 4 Howard St. (under red awning reading 4A) 5 p.m. - 8 p.m.**  
To volunteer, contact VSEA Organizer Jennifer Larsen at 338-6052 ([jlarsen@vsea.org](mailto:jlarsen@vsea.org))
- **Wednesday, April 8 – (Retirees) Montpelier, VSEA HQ, 155 State St. 10 a.m. – 3 p.m.**  
To volunteer, contact VSEA Organizer Jennifer Larsen at 338-6052 ([jlarsen@vsea.org](mailto:jlarsen@vsea.org))
- **Wednesday, April 8 – Montpelier, VSEA HQ, 155 State St. 5 p.m. – 8 p.m.**  
To volunteer, contact VSEA Organizer Kristen Warner at 223-5247 ([kwarnar@vsea.org](mailto:kwarnar@vsea.org))

In advance of the rally, VSEA has created an online rally registration page, and members who are attending are encouraged to [click here](#) to complete the quick registration form. It's not necessary, but it will help VSEA plan more accordingly. Thanks.

VSEA members are also invited to visit the Fight Back Rally Facebook page, which can be found [here](#).

## **Online Postcard Now Available**

In the past few weeks, VSEA Organizers and activists have been visiting worksites across Vermont to conduct “Fight Back” campaign meetings, updating members on your union’s efforts to change the debate in Montpelier from cutting services and jobs to generating new revenue. Part of each meeting has been devoted to members filling out personal message postcards to be hand delivered to their lawmakers in Montpelier. This week, [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.

## **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.

## **Deadline Approaching To Complete NMU Bargaining Survey!**

The deadline to complete the VSEA Non-Management Unit Bargaining Team’s survey is April 15, 2015! The survey seeks to assess NMU members’ bargaining priorities before entering into formal negotiations this fall with the State. The NMU 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](#).

## **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.”

## **Lyndonville Police Chief Comes Out Against PSAP Consolidation After Losing Dispatcher Contact During High-Speed Chase**

The *Caledonian Record* reports on April 2 that the technology intended to allow the consolidation of Vermont's four existing 911 Emergency Dispatch Centers recently failed Lyndonville's Police Chief during a high-speed vehicle chase. The technology glitch the Chief experienced actually occurred during a test of the new software, which is supposed to reroute dispatch calls normally going to Derby to Williston.

The chief, Jack Harris, tells the paper he was providing backup on an April 1 high-speed chase on I-91 and could not reach the Dispatcher handling the emergency call. He tried unsuccessfully for 10 minutes and then gave up. His computer showed no record that he had ever been logged in or out by dispatchers. The paper reports that Dispatchers listening in Derby were able to hear Chief Harris.

"I could have been in a crash, and no one at the PSAP (911 Dispatch Center) would have known it," says Harris. "Somebody could get killed out of this."

Harris had been on the fence about the State's proposed PSAP consolidation, but now he has serious reservations. "It may be a good idea to wait until they work this out," he adds.

Consolidation advocate and leader, Vermont State Police Captain Don Patch, tells the paper he does not know why Harris couldn't reach Dispatchers both before and after the chase. Patch also says there were some minor computer issues early on April 1, but they were normal and "similar to what a home computer operator might experience."

Harris says his experience has prompted him to begin monitoring the communications of his younger officers, while they are out on patrol, making sure Dispatchers are hearing them.

*Note: VSEA frontline Dispatchers will be at the State House on April 7 to testify again against the proposed PSAP consolidation.*

## **New Week Means More Great "Fight Back" Letters To Local Media**

VSEA member and Benefits Program Specialist Melissa Pettersson shared a letter this week with *WIA* that she submitted recently to the *Orleans Record*.

Here's an excerpt:

*"...to immediately assume that the workforce of the state, those individuals who are part of the middle class, are to be the first to be sacrificed is unpalatable. The expectation that a negotiated contract is nothing but a worthless piece of paper, rather than a legal obligation, to be ripped up at the whim of the [State], is not acceptable. Actually threatening those employees with draconian tactics is nothing less than bullying."*

VSEA members John Davy and William Wells also penned letters this week to *Seven Days*, both commenting on a piece the paper had published about VSEA's fight with the State on the budget.

Here's are excerpts:

[From Davy's letter]

*"Middle- class wages continue to stagnate, while the wealthy increasingly grow richer through non-wage capital earnings. Meanwhile, legislators cling to an outdated mode of taxation. Vermont could join the majority of states that tax capital gains like wage income, reduce tax deductions available to the very wealthy (some who pay no income tax), and address citizens' increased health care costs."*

[From Wells' letter]

*“A budget is a moral document; it shows where your values are. These values were on display last week in the Vermont House of Representatives when votes were cast on H.489, an act relating to revenue. Two amendments were voted on before the eventual passage of the budget bill. These amendments attempted to raise revenue from those in our society who have much, and prevent cuts to programs helping struggling Vermonters, by levying a \$2 nightly hotel occupancy fee, and attempting to impose more fairness to Vermont’s income tax.”*

To read Melissa, John and William’s full letters, please [click here](#).

## **Lawmakers Tell Windsor Workers That Closure Is Not A “Done Deal”**

After recently learning their correctional facility is being considered for closure to save money, employees working at the Southeast State in Windsor didn’t waste any time appealing to local lawmakers to visit and see for themselves how valuable their service is.

The March 26 [Valley News reported](#) on the reaction VSEA’s SSCF members received from local lawmakers who joined an employee-sponsored tour to highlight the great results the facility’s Community High School of Vermont program is producing.

Several legislative leaders participated in the tour, including Windsor Senators Alice Nitka, Dick McCormack and Windsor Representatives Donna Sweaney. Nearly all were in agreement that the closing of Windsor is not set in stone. “This is one way for saving some money, but I don’t think it’s a fait accompli,” Sweaney tells the paper.

Senate Pro Tem John Capbell, who also represents Windsor, could not attend but sent an email that read: “The decision to close the Southeast State Correctional Facility is not a done deal. I plan on meeting with all interested parties to discuss the pending decision to close the facility, I do not wish to send more prisoners out of state, and I am very concerned with the possible loss of 60 jobs.”

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

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

Department of Economic Services  
67 Eastern Ave.

**April 6 and 7**

Suite 7

St. Johnsbury

12:00 to 3:00

**Northeast Correctional Facility**

**April 8**

Conference Room

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.

## **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.*

## 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)

## 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 [aulis@comcast.net](mailto:aulis@comcast.net).

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

## Upcoming Meetings/Events/Holidays:

### April 7

Joint Safety & Health Committee Meeting  
Records Building  
Middlesex  
9:00 a.m.

### April 7

Senate Appropriations Committee Public Hearing  
FY2016 Budget  
State House  
Montpelier  
1:30 p.m.

### April 8

NMU Executive Committee Meeting  
VSEA HQ  
Montpelier  
9:00 a.m.

**April 9**

Retirees' Chapter Meeting

VSEA HQ

Montpelier

9:30 a.m.

**April 9**

Specialized Steward Training: Judiciary Bargaining Unit

VTrans Training Center

1716 U.S. Rte. 302

Berlin

9:00 a.m.

**April 10**

VSEA Council Member Training -- Southeast VT

First Floor Conference Room

State Office Building

100 Mineral St.

Springfield

9:30 a.m.

**April 11**

VSEA Fight Back Rally

State House

Montpelier

Noon