



WEEK IN ACTION!

Weekly News From Your Union ~ May 11, 2015 – May 15, 2015

Legislators Wrapping Up Session. Number Of RIFs Still Unclear.

It's still not clear exactly when the gavel will bang to signal adjournment of what has been a very messy 2015 legislative session, but leaders are still saying it will be soon. Also unclear is how many RIFs will end up coming out of whatever final budget deal is brokered.

This highly unsettling legislative session began with the State's unexpected call for VSEA members to magically produce nearly \$11 million in "personnel savings," and then it grew worse when the State began openly threatening to cut more than 400 frontline workers if VSEA could not produce the funds. Thankfully, cooler heads eventually prevailed and, working collaboratively, VSEA and the State were able to identify non-contractual savings that greatly lessened the number of cuts the State said it needed—but, unfortunately, it still has not been enough for the State to stop looking to cut services and jobs. VSEA members did provide a bunch of ideas to generate new revenue to counter the cuts, but most were not entertained.

That brings us to today, as VSEA members wait for word about a final budget from Senate and House budget conference committee members. As soon as VSEA's legislative team has all the information it needs, they will be providing VSEA members with a comprehensive summary of what is contained in the final budget bill and how it will impact frontline workers and the services you provide.

If you receive an "action alert" from VSEA in these final hours of the session, please heed the call and do whatever is asked because it will probably have something to do with helping to stop more cuts.

Please check VSEA's website, Facebook page and Twitter feed periodically in the next few days for updates.

VSEA Sends Response To Reardon Letter To Budget Committee Conferees

In a last-minute attempt by the State to influence the upcoming budget debate by Senate and House conference committee members (a.k.a. conferees), Finance Commissioner Jim Reardon sent a memo this week to conferees, clarifying the State's position on several key budget areas, including some important to VSEA members.

On some points outlined in Reardon's memo, VSEA agreed, including the State's support to include Corrections in "pilot projects" being launched to reduce the state's dependence on temps and contractors. But on other points, VSEA disagreed, especially on Reardon's renewed request not to require every DOC facility to house a Community High School of Vermont (CHSVT) campus.

VSEA Legislative Director Ben Palkowski responded to the State's CHSVT request, sending this excerpt to conferees:

"VSEA disagrees with the Administration's position regarding the corrections education program. We appreciate both the House's and the Senate's proposals to restore funding for this important program, though we agree with the Senate's proposed statutory change.

Specifically, regarding 28 V.S.A. § 120(d), eliminating the provision that services be provided in each facility and department service center is a purely fiscal recommendation. There are individuals who require educational services in every correctional facility within the state. The Department of Corrections needs impetus to fill the classes within each facility, not flexibility to continue to underutilize a valuable resource that can reduce the recidivism rate in Vermont.

Additionally, there is a critical need for persons under the custody of the Commissioner to transfer among facilities throughout the State, as needed, to support the State's need to reduce the number of out-of-state beds, while factoring in community reintegration.

As for 28 V.S.A. § 120(h) language, there is no upper age limit for education within Vermont. Education and employment training have been shown to have a positive effect on the recidivism rate; both of which are provided and coordinated by Community High School of Vermont. In addition, while individuals may qualify for services offered through Adult Education providers throughout the state, all of these providers have not been willing to serve people who are incarcerated, nor are they trained to work within a correctional setting, whereas CHSVT is an accredited school with a track record of success staff who are far better at working with the this particular population.

Moreover, the Senate's language in this regard is in sync with the Department's policy which identifies 'education need' through the new OMS casework system more broadly, without respect to age."

VSEA also took issue with Reardon's assertion that lawmakers have not done enough to address the "structural spending issues facing state government," writing "VSEA has maintained throughout this legislative session that the structural budgetary issues that this state faces are the result of insufficient revenue."

Note: VSEA's Legislative team will be tracking the upcoming budget discussions by conference committee members and WIA will keep readers updated on developments.

Asbestos Finding Displaces Workers At The Barre Courthouse. VSEA Monitoring.

VSEA President Shelley Martin wasted no time sending a message on May 12 to VSEA members working at the Courthouse in Barre that VSEA will be closely monitoring any and all developments after electricians working in the building discovered a "low-level," asbestos-related health hazard after removing ceiling tiles. The asbestos finding was enough to prompt the State to close the building, and BGS and the Department of Health (VDH) are currently conducting a full inspection.

Martin's message to employees read, in part:

"VSEA is pleased that the [State] has elected to immediately remove employees from the building. We appreciate that no time is being wasted to identify alternative work sites for you and your displaced colleagues. Thank you in advance for your cooperation and understanding, as State safety and health experts now step in to assess the threat and advise VSEA, the State, and Courthouse employees of what employees need to know and next steps."

In a May 12 press release about the finding, Secretary of the Administration Justin Johnson wrote, "The length of the [Courthouse] closure will depend on further test results. In the event that the closure will be longer than a few days we will work with all the affected departments to put into place contingency plans."

In the same release, VDH Commissioner Dr. Harry Chen says, "There is no indication at this point that employees or visitors to the building have been exposed to asbestos fibers, but further testing is needed to determine whether there is a problem that requires remediation. We should have more information to report in a few days."

Johnson adds that the closure could extend beyond this week, depending on further test results. If the closure will be more than a few days, he says, the State will work with all the affected departments to put in place contingency plans.

Breaking: This morning's *Times Argus* reports that the State has completed testing at the Courthouse and found no widespread issues with asbestos. Secretary of the Administration Justin Johnson said the Courthouse will reopen on Tuesday, May 19.

Safety & Health Issue Where You Work? Here's What You Can Do.

With this week's news about the Barre Courthouse, VSEA Field Services Director Gretchen Naylor is reminding that she and several VSEA members continue to staff a monthly Joint Safety and Health Maintenance Committee, which is a labor/management committee established under Article 29 of the contract between the State and VSEA's Non-Management Unit. The Committee fields unresolved building-related safety and health complaints from workers and then does its best to investigate the issue(s) and offer a plan of action to the State.

Naylor asked *WIA* to remind members that if they are experiencing a building-related safety and health issue, they should first file a [Building Related Issue Notification](#) with BGS, and if they do not receive a timely response, or a response period, please then forward your complaint directly to the Joint Safety and Health Maintenance Committee, [using this form](#).

"The BRIN form remains the primary reporting tool to let the State know about a potential building-related safety and health issue," explains Naylor. "But if a member's form is not getting the attention it should, or if the member's form is being ignored, the Safety and Health Maintenance Committee is there to review how the process failed the member and what can be done about it. VSEA members can also bring other safety and health issues to the Committee that are not building related, meaning a need for things like safety equipment or increased security presence."

Facing Potential \$1.5 Million Cut, AOT Members Are Encouraged By Management's Stated Commitment To Protect Existing Workforce

Rightly concerned that both the House and Senate are proposing to cut \$1.5 million in Agency of Transportation (AOT) "personnel" costs, VSEA AOT members were encouraged by news they received at a recent labor/management committee meeting. According to those who attended, AOT managers said if the agency is instructed to cut personnel costs, agency heads are intending to absorb the budget cut with vacancy savings.

One reason AOT can be optimistic that vacancy savings could prevent cuts is the State's pending "retirement incentive." Throughout the AOT, it's estimated that as many as 200 frontline workers will be eligible to retire because of the incentive. Management did clarify that they had not been briefed yet by the State on the details of the incentive, so VSEA members and staff shared what they knew with them.

"Given the ongoing high demands of the job, I doubt many VSEA AOT members are happy they could soon be losing some experienced co-workers due to budget cuts," VSEA Union Representative David Van Deusen tells *WIA*. "But it's also true that these long-term employees are being offered an incentive to retire and not forced out simply because lawmakers won't raise the revenue needed. It's making the best of a not so great situation." Van Deusen also praised the productive, ongoing dialogue occurring at the meetings between AOT labor and management, and he noted that the large turnout of AOT workers to the VSEA's April 11 Fight Back Rally was very helpful in terms of sending a strong message about AOT unity to leaders and politicians.

Discounted 2015 Great Escape/Splashwater Kingdom Day Tickets Available Soon!

"Two parks of fun for the price of one!"
Lake George, New York

Park Opens May 16, 2015, & Splashwater Opens May 23, 2015

Discount tickets will be available **soon** for pickup at VSEA HQ or for purchase online (log-in details coming!)

2015 Regular Day Tickets = \$33 each (\$25 savings over price at gate)

Retirees' Group Collecting Stories From VSEA Retirees To Share At National Conference!

In an article in a soon-to-be-mailed retiree newsletter, past VSEA Retirees' Chapter President Jane Osgatharp is making an appeal to VSEA retirees to share their statements with her about:

- Access to medical care; and
- Reliance on Social Security, heating and housing assistance and food stamps, if applicable.

Osgatharp, now acting in her role as President of the Vermont Association for Retired Americans, is collecting your stories and will be sharing them with persons attending this summer's White House Conference on Aging, which, after a decade-long hiatus, is resuming this year.

In addition to appealing for your statements, Osgatharp is also looking for retirees who want to help her with the project. If you would be interested, please contact Jane by phone at (802) 229-0850 or by email at annajaneo@aol.com.

Quote Of The Week!

"It seems they are serving refried beans that were sent back last week."

House Speaker Shap Smith's appropriate response in *VTDigger* to a letter the State sent to legislative leaders this week, insisting they accept its last-minute budget cuts that include an additional \$3 million cut to public services and the Vermonters who provide them.

AOE Workers Invited To May 19 Meeting

VSEA Union Representative Josh Massey is inviting interested Agency of Education (AOE) workers to attend a meeting on Tuesday, May 19, from noon to 1:00 p.m. in Room 304. Massey and AOE labor team members will be briefing AOE workers on what was discussed a recent labor/management meeting. Pizza and drinks are being provided.

Questions? Please contact VSEA Union Representative Josh Massey by cell at (802) 272-2201 or by email at jmassey@vsea.org.

VSEA Members & Retirees Warned About "Express Pharmacy Services" Phone Scam

Early this week, VSEA President Shelley Martin sent an email to all members, agency-fee payers and retirees, alerting folks to a telemarketing scam being perpetrated by individuals calling VSEA members and claiming to be a representative of "Express Pharmacy Services."

Sharing VSEA's concerns, the State issued a press release on May 14, and it reads:

The Vermont Department of Human Resources (DHR) today is initiating warnings to members of the State Employees' Health Plan about a telemarketing practice promoting compounded prescription drugs that can cost thousands of dollars. The telemarketing calls, apparently similar to those received by consumers in neighboring states, market a compounded pain gel or cream. The caller asks whether the consumer is in pain, requests the consumer's personal information, and then contacts the consumer's doctor directly to request the medication be prescribed. The prescription is later billed to the consumer's health insurance, at a cost of several thousand dollars.

"We are very concerned that this telemarketing practice has made its way to Vermont and to State employees and retirees," said DHR Commissioner Maribeth Spellman. "Giving out personally identifying information over the phone is dangerous, as it can be used in many ways, including identity theft, or sale to third parties. Also, medical issues are best discussed with a physician one-on-one."

The company targeting Vermonters goes by the name "Express Pharmacy Services" which is very similar to the name of the pharmacy benefit management company that works with the State, Express Scripts, Inc. This could cause confusion for the call recipient, although it should be noted that Express Scripts never requests such information from consumers over the phone. Additionally, the calls may come from a Vermont number.

Commissioner Spellman urges the public to report any suspicious phone calls.

"If you receive this call, make note of the number, and any statements made by the caller, and notify the Vermont Attorney General's Office of Consumer Assistance," Commissioner Spellman concluded.

Complaints can be filed with the Vermont Attorney General's Office of Consumer Assistance Program at www.uvm.edu/consumer or by calling 800-649-2424. Additionally, complaints can be sent to the Consumer Assistance Program at 146 University Place, 103 Morrill Hall, UVM, Burlington, VT 05405.

Woodside Members Still Being Sought For Labor/Management Committee

VSEA Senior Union Representative Kelly Burns continues to search for workers at the Woodside Juvenile Rehabilitation Center who are interested in sitting on a labor/management committee.

"Woodside's rank-and-file workers have to deal with some pretty unique issues, and they've been clear with me in meetings that a need exists to address them," explains Burns. "A labor/management committee is very beneficial, mostly because it gives workers a great way to offer possible solutions to management and then help develop the ideas mutually."

Burns adds that if enough Woodside workers show interest, the committee formed would meet regularly with management and Human Resources to discuss an agenda of non-contractual workplace issues and see if there are areas where creative resolutions can be agreed to and possibly implemented.

To date, Burns says that four Woodside workers have expressed interest, but a need still exists for more.

"To ensure all Woodside workers' issues are being addressed, it would be great to have members on the committee representing many different positions and working various shifts," she says.

If you are interested in participating or have any questions, please email Kelly at kburns@vsea.org.

VSEA Insurance Representative In Newport Next Week

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

May 19

Northern State Correctional Facility*
2559 Glen Rd.
Newport
12:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

May 20

Northern State Correctional Facility*
2559 Glen Rd.
Newport
12:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

* If you work at another Newport worksite, please call (802) 485-4820 to arrange a morning appointment with Joanne.

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.

CEO Pay Skyrockets To 373 Times The Average Worker In 2014

The national AFL-CIO recently updated its excellent '[Executive PayWatch](#)' website to include CEO pay and compensation data for 2014. The site, which collects CEO data and then compares it to what the average American worker is earning, reveals that, today, the average CEO earns 373 times what the average working person does. That's a 16% increase from 2013 when CEOs were earning a mere 331 times what their workers were.

"Workers in this country are struggling," AFL-CIO President Rich Trumka tells CNBC. "They're barely getting by, and CEOs—the new royalty in this country—got a 16 percent pay increase last year."

Trumka used Wal-Mart as an example of egregious inequality, sharing that Wal-Mart CEO Doug McMillon earned \$9,323 per hour while starting Wal-Mart employees are paid only \$9 per hour. That, Trumka said, means it would take these workers 1,036 hours to earn one hour of McMillon's pay.

A former Wal-Mart employee, Tiffany, provided this comment about the inequality to a newspaper, saying, "In 2013, I earned about \$12,000 as a full-time employee, which, at Wal-Mart, isn't always 40 hours each week. These poverty wages forced my family to receive public assistance. Wal-Mart doesn't value me. I believe in working hard and that my work should be valued. This is why I will not stop fighting until Wal-Mart commits to raising wages and begins valuing all of its workers."

The AFL-CIO Executive PayWatch tool is the most comprehensive searchable online database tracking the excessive pay of CEOs of the nation's largest companies. The website offers visitors the ability to compare their own pay to the pay of top executives, highlights [the 100 top-paid CEOs](#) and breaks out CEO pay data [by state](#) and [by industry](#). The site also tracks and grades [votes cast by 106 of the largest mutual fund families](#) on executive compensation at the public companies they invest in. Mutual funds own more than one-fifth of all shares in U.S. public companies, giving them a great deal of influence in determining executive pay at these companies.

Executive PayWatch also gives you a chance to [take action and ask](#) the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission to require big corporations to disclose their ratio of CEO to median employee pay.

Election Season Kicks Off!

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 Monday, June 1, 2015, petition deadline for VSEA members wishing to run for any one of the following Board of Trustee seats:

- 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 Board seats above can find a filing petition [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. This makes the deadline Tuesday, July 14, 2015.

- VSEA President
- VSEA First Vice President
- VSEA Second Vice President
- VSEA Clerk
- VSEA Treasurer

VSEA members interested in running for one of the "Elected Officer" positions above can find a filing petition [here](#).

Note: If running to be an elected officer, please make sure you clearly indicate the office you seek in the space provided. Primarily, this means distinguishing between First and Second VP.

Deadline Approaching To Self-Nominate For VSEA Departmental Council Seat

VSEA Elections, Rules and Nominating Committee Chair Mary Poulos asked *WIA* to include a reminder to VSEA members that now is the time to self-nominate for a VSEA departmental Council seat.

All departmental Council seats are open, and current terms will expire on September 30, 2015. The deadline to submit a self-nomination form is Tuesday, June 30, 2015.

To find out how many Council seats are allotted your department, please contact VSEA Administrative Assistant Ayla Hudson at 802-223-5247, or by e-mail at ahudson@vsea.org.

You can find a self-nominating form by clicking [here](#).

VSEA President Looking For Interest To Participate In June 6 "Bury Cancer, Survivorship Celebration Parade"

In recognition of national "Cancer Survivorship Day," a special parade to commemorate Vermont cancer survivors is being held Saturday, June 6, through downtown Barre, and VSEA is asking members interested in marching, or in entering a float, to please contact VSEA President Shelley Martin at smartin@vsea.org (please write "Bury Cancer" in the subject line).

"People who know me know that I am a proud cancer survivor, and I know I am not alone. I have met more than a few members in my travels who have shared their story of cancer survival with me," says Martin. "Even if it wasn't you personally, which I hope it never is, almost everyone knows of someone, a family member or friend, who has beaten cancer or who is fighting the disease at this very

moment. **This is why I would really like VSEA to be a part of this day and why I'm actively looking to see how many members want to march in this parade with me on June 6. Groups can also enter a float, so we can do that too, if enough members want to help build it."**

Martin reminded us that one of the primary reasons the State gave for a recent health care plan premium hike was an increasing number of state employees/dependents who have cancer or heart issues.

"I really hope a lot of my VSEA brothers and sisters who are battling cancer, or who have survived cancer, will be interested in joining me for this event," adds Martin.

The "Bury Cancer Survivorship Celebration Parade" starts at 1:00 p.m, and other featured events throughout the day include: a 5k run/walk sponsored by The Gym for Women, music by Vermont singer/songwriter Patrick Fitzsimmons, a dinner and Bogle wine pairing and auction sponsored by Calmont Beverage, and a night time light show in City Park.

All proceeds from the event will go to the Vermont Cancer Survivor Network (VCSN); a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the quality of life for anyone dealing with cancer (click [here](#) to view VCSN website). VCSN provides programs of support, information and education, celebrates cancer survivorship, advocates for cancer survivors and collaborates with related institutions and organizations. Featured programs include: Kindred Connections, a one-on-one support for people going through cancer, and a "Sally Fox Memorial" Gas Card fund to ease the cost of transportation to and from cancer related appointments.

Spring/Summer Steward Training Schedule Announced

VSEA Labor Educator Tim Lench is announcing the next series of Steward Trainings, which will be held during the spring/summer 2015.

All trainings begin at 9:00 a.m. and end at 4:00 p.m. Each is open to all VSEA members.

Steward 1: Introduction and the Basics

Thursday, June 4
VTrans Training Center,
1716 U.S. Rte. 302
Berlin

Steward 2: Protecting the Contract and Building the Union

Thursday, June 11
VTrans Training Center,
1716 U.S. Rte. 302
Berlin

Health Care Facilities: Stewards and Members Leaders

Wednesday, June 17
VTrans District Office
61 Valley View
Mendon (five miles east of Rutland)

Diversity and Solidarity for Public Sector Union Members

Tuesday, June 23
VTrans Training Center,
1716 U.S. Rte. 302
Berlin

Steward 3: The Contract and Challenges in the Workplace

Thursday, June 25

VTrans Training Center,
1716 U.S. Rte. 302
Berlin

Steward 1: Introduction and the Basics

Tuesday, June 30
VTrans Training Center,
1716 U.S. Rte. 302
Berlin

Stewards and the “Hostile Work Environment”

Tuesday, July 7
VTrans Training Center,
1716 U.S. Rte. 302
Berlin

Steward 2: Protecting the Contract and Building the Union

Tuesday, July 14
VTrans Training Center,
1716 U.S. Rte. 302
Berlin

Department of Children and Families: Stewards and Labor Team Members

Tuesday, July 21
VTrans Training Center,
1716 U.S. Rte. 302
Berlin

Steward 3: The Contract and Challenges in the Workplace

Tuesday, July 28
VTrans Training Center,
1716 U.S. Rte. 302
Berlin

To register for a listed training, please [click here](#):

Questions? Contact Tim Lenoach for details: tlenoch@vsea.org

[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.

Upcoming Meetings/Events/Holidays:

May 18

Budget Committee Meeting
VSEA HQ
Montpelier
1:00 p.m.

May 19

VSEA Scholarship DEADLINE!
4:30 p.m.

May 19

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

May 19

Board Of Trustees' Meeting
VSEA HQ
Montpelier
9:30 a.m.

May 19

AOE Workers' Meeting
Room 304
Barre
Noon

May 19

Meet w/VSEA Insurance Rep

Northern State Correctional Facility
Newport
Noon – 4:00 p.m.

May 20

Rutland Chapter Meeting
Three Tomatoes Restaurant
Rutland
Noon

May 20

Meet w/VSEA Insurance Rep
Northern State Correctional Facility
Newport
Noon – 4:00 p.m.

May 20

Franklin/Grand Isle Chapter Meeting
Mimmo's Restaurant
St. Albans
5:00 p.m.

May 21

Retirees' Chapter Meeting
VSEA HQ
Montpelier
9:00 a.m.

May 21

Awards & Scholarships Committee Meeting
VSEA HQ
Montpelier
9:00 a.m.