



WEEK IN ACTION!

Weekly News From Your Union ~ December 14, 2015 – December 18, 2015

VSEA Members Conduct “Worker Safety” Action

Taking advantage of the especially balmy temperatures that graced Vermont on Tuesday, VSEA members packed a small courtyard outside the Supreme Court and Pavilion Buildings in Montpelier to conduct a “worker safety” rally in advance of the 2016 legislative session, which begins on January 5. Holding signs reading “We Support Our State Employees” (which are now available for pickup at VSEA HQ!), VSEA members, supporters and the press heard firsthand accounts of the need for worksite safety enhancements from Economic Services Division Benefits Program Specialist (and VSEA First VP) Aimee Towne, Green Mountain Psychiatric Care Facility Mental Health Specialist Beverly Ordway, Judiciary Family Case Manager Bill Capasso and Department for Children and Families Social Worker Kara Haynes.

Towne reminded members that the time for action on this important issue is now and she related how she had recently been frightened by a Vermonter who loudly challenged her work in a not so nice way in the middle of a convenience store. She was not officially on the job but had forgotten to remove her state ID badge. Ordway spoke about the high number of patient-on-staff assaults just this year at the GMPCF (160 through October 2015), and she reminded that this workforce couldn’t report these incidents the same way a DCF or other worker can because the assaults are kept confidential. “For workers at the State Hospital, the issue of worker safety is something all of us think about nearly every day,” Ordway said. “We’re told sometimes that the nature of our work is dangerous, but that doesn’t make an assault on a staff person any easier.” Capasso reminded that Judiciary workers have been waiting for some or all of a report’s recommended safety enhancements to be implemented in courthouses across Vermont. That report, he reminded, was delivered to lawmakers in January 2015. Capasso pleaded, “We’re the ones that make the judiciary run, we want respect, we want to feel safe when we come to work.” Finally, Haynes reminded about the terrible tragedy in Barre in August and how workers had recently come forward with recommendations for safety enhancements that they will be lobbying hard in 2016 to get implemented. “If we can’t protect the children we’re supposed to be protecting, what’s the point of state government?” Haynes asked.

Following the speakers’ remarks, a delegation of rank-and-file VSEA leaders, led by President Bellini and Treasurer Coniff, walked in to the Pavilion Building and hand-delivered a letter listing VSEA’s top three legislative priorities (number one being worker and public safety enhancements) to Secretary of the Administration Justin Johnson, who would not discuss details of what the State is doing to address safety now, and he cautioned that nothing the State does will ever make things 100 percent safe. When asked by Bellini about the possibility of installing metal detectors in Probation and Parole offices, Johnson replied, “We will be doing something, absolutely.”

Here’s some press on the workers’ rally:

[VTDigger](#)
[WCAX](#)

VSEA Council Members Hear About Grievance Procedure & State Budget Deficit

Many of the VSEA members attending Tuesday’s “worker safety” rally were Council members who were in town to attend the body’s quarterly meeting. It was VSEA First VP Aimee Towne’s first meeting, acting as the Council’s Chairperson, and she did great, continuing her predecessor Michelle Salvador’s efforts to provide Council members with the knowledge, material, resources they need to mobilize and activate VSEA members back in the worksites on important issues. At Tuesday’s meeting,

VSEA General Counsel Tim Belcher provided Council members with a comprehensive overview of the grievance process, how VSEA members function within the process and the system challenges VSEA members periodically confront and how your union is working to overcome them moving forward. Council members also heard an informative presentation about creating a “moral budget” from the Public Assets Institute’s Jack Hoffman, who, like VSEA members, understands the way the State and lawmakers are confronting Vermont’s yearly budget deficits is not working. Hoffman told members he is a proponent for asking Vermonters with the capacity to pay a little more to protect Vermont’s public services and state employee jobs, noting that employed state workers are key to helping drive our economy.

Council members also received updates from President Bellini, Executive Director Howard and Treasurer Manchester Coniff.

DCF Workers Continue To Meet With Lawmakers In Advance Of Session

On the heels of last week’s DCF frontline workers meeting with lawmakers in Burlington to discuss safety, DCF workers in Williston held a similar meeting this week with their area lawmakers, including Rep. Ann Pugh (D-S. Burlington), who chairs the House Human Services Committee. The meeting was very well attended and the discussion was productive.

This was the first opportunity for frontline workers to discuss last week’s serious threat against DCF in Williston. Workers told legislators that news reports of offices being on lockdown were incorrect, as no lockdown protocol currently exists within DCF to direct employees.

Alerted To Risk Of Privatization, Group Of VSEA Members Mobilizing To Defend Their Service

If you asked one of the nine VSEA members left working in the State’s Risk Management Division what the odds are the State is actively trying to privatize their service, they would tell you 100 percent. That’s because the workers were recently able to verify that the State had drafted a formal proposal to privatize Risk Management and was actively shopping it.

“It appears the State wants to privatize this important service and, in the process, throw away more than 100 years of combined and very specialized knowledge,” one Risk Management worker who wished to remain nameless tells *WIA*. “We are Vermonters serving Vermonters, and we know the people we serve. We also know state worksites and the nature of state employee work, across the board. And we know the system’s challenges. Most important, we are the ones helping state employees get back to work after suffering a work illness or injury. Privatizing our service is, quite frankly, a risky move by the State, in my opinion.”

VSEA’s Risk Management members add that they have worked hard recently to streamline the claims process and “smooth out the bumps.” **They also stress that when state employees contact their office, they are talking with a fellow state employee and not some person representing a private company that may not even be based in Vermont.**

“VSEA is providing staff resources to the workers’ fight to stop privatization, and we will be bringing members from Risk Management to the State House early in the session to make their very strong case to lawmakers to retain this important division of state government,” VSEA Executive Director Steve Howard tells *WIA*.

WIA will keep readers updated on how you can help the Risk Management workers protect their service.

DII Service Also Being Threatened With Privatization

Through a freedom of information request filed recently, VSEA was able to confirm a rumor this week that DII is actively soliciting private vendors to provide bids to administer the State’s mainframe, which

is currently maintained by a dozen or so state employees. VSEA received a report, titled “*A Mainframe Outsourcing: Financial Impact Analysis For the State of Vermont*,” which outlines four different scenarios, two that retain existing employees and two that do not. In the two scenarios that do not include retaining state employees, nearly every frontline worker is replaced.

WIA will keep readers updated on any developments with this privatization effort.

[Auditor’s Findings Answer VSEA Members’ Question: Are Taxpayers Getting Maximum Bang For Their Buck When State Contracts With Private Vendors?](#)

It’s no secret that Vermont public services and the men and women who provide them are constantly called upon to help solve the state’s budget woes. Every year, state employees are told there’s just no money to be found anywhere else, so “trim the fat,” “do more with less” and “suck it up.” You watch as seasoned workers “retire” from critical positions, wondering how that experience will be replaced and, worse, if it will be replaced. Meanwhile, demand for the services you provide has increased over the course of America’s economic recession, but the cuts just keep coming. This year, however, VSEA members will be able to punch back with a way for the state to find potentially millions in new savings, and that’s thanks to a new audit from the Auditor’s Office that exposes the flawed system currently governing the way agencies and departments award contracts to private vendors.

Released late last Friday, [Sole Source Contracts: Extraordinary Use in Ordinary Times](#), contains findings like:

- The State has required a competitive bidding process when contracting with private vendors for more than 20 years, yet, the awarding of “sole-source” (a.k.a. “no-bid”) contracts today by State agencies and departments is “commonplace”;
- The total amount awarded through no-bid contracts for 2015 was \$68 million, or 27 percent of all;
- The Legislature enacted rules in 1995 to ensure that the no-bid contracts were limited to “extraordinary” circumstances, yet the Auditor’s Office found that, in the five agencies audited, 41 percent of the 1000 contracts awarded were no bid. The five agencies were: AHS, AOE, BGS, DCF and DVHA;
- Many of the contracts “lacked evidence” to warrant being called “extraordinary” and be granted no-bid status; and
- Knowing a contractor personally took precedence over an “open and competitive” process.

[In a December 15 VT Digger story](#), State Auditor reacts to his team’s findings, saying: “The high frequency of sole source contracts reviewed for this analysis raises questions about the effectiveness of the state’s contract management. The State’s longstanding policy to competitively bid for contracts is meant to ensure taxpayers receive the highest values for their contracted dollars and Vermont businesses are afforded an equal opportunity to obtain contracts.”

In advance of the upcoming 2016 session, VSEA members are urged to contact their lawmakers and ask them to find savings this year by reforming the State’s contracting practices with private vendors and not cutting services and jobs.

[See A VSEA Yard Sign? Snap A Photo And Post It To VSEA’s Facebook Page](#)

VSEA began distributing yard signs to Council members this week, in hopes the signs will soon start springing up in the communities where VSEA members live and work.

In the coming weeks and months, if you spot a VSEA yard sign, snap a photo and post it to VSEA’s Facebook page or send it VSEA Communications Director Doug Gibson at dgibson@vsea.org, and he’ll post it for you.

If you need signs, they are available for pickup at VSEA headquarters in Montpelier. VSEA will also be urging leaders, members and retirees visiting HQ to take some signs back to their worksites and their communities.

VSEA Labor Educator Announces Winter/Spring 2016 Training Schedule

VSEA Labor Educator Tim Lenocho asked WIA to announce a new round of trainings he has scheduled for winter/spring 2016. If you are interested in registering to attend one or more trainings, you can do so by [clicking here](#). Please direct your training questions to Tim at tlenoch@vsea.org.

Trainings in blue are for all members.

The Labor Activist

Thursday, January 14
VTrans Training Center
1716 U.S. Route 302
Berlin

Steward Training: Judiciary Unit

Wednesday, January 20
VTrans Training Center
1716 U.S. Route 302
Berlin

Department for Children and Families: Workplace Safety

Wednesday, February 3
VTrans Training Center
1716 U.S. Route 302
Berlin

Steward Training: Chittenden & Lamoille County

Thursday, February 11
DVHA Conference Room
312 Hurricane Lane, Suite 201
Williston

Steward Training: Supervisory Unit

Wednesday, February 17
VTrans Training Center
1716 U.S. Route 302
Berlin

Steward 1: Introduction & The Basics

Friday, March 4
VTrans Training Center
1716 U.S. Route 302
Berlin

Steward Training: Health Care Facilities

Wednesday, March 9
VTrans District Office,
61 Valley View
Mendon (five miles east of Rutland)

Steward 2: Protecting The Contract & Building The Union

Friday, March 18
VTrans Training Center
1716 U.S. Route 302
Berlin

Steward Training: The “Hostile Work Environment”

Wednesday, March 23
VTrans Training Center
1716 U.S. Route 302
Berlin

Steward 3: The Contract & Challenges in the Workplace

Friday, March 25
VTrans Training Center
1716 U.S. Route 302
Berlin

Steward Training: Investigations & Working With Human Resources

Wednesday, March 30
VTrans Training Center
1716 U.S. Route 302
Berlin

Steward Training: Corrections Unit

Wednesday, April 6
VTrans Training Center
1716 U.S. Route 302
Berlin

Steward Training: The Grievance

Wednesday, April 13
VTrans Training Center
1716 U.S. Route 302
Berlin

Steward Training: The Labor/Management Committee

Friday, April 15
VTrans Training Center
1716 U.S. Route 302
Berlin

Diversity & Solidarity For Public Sector Union Members

Friday, April 22
VTrans Training Center
1716 U.S. Route 302
Berlin

Mark The Date! VSEA State House Day Is Thursday, February 25, 2016!

VSEA’s annual State House Day will be Thursday, February 25, 2016.

This is the perfect venue for frontline state employees to meet face to face with their local lawmakers to talk about the service you provide and the challenges that confront you daily, especially when it comes to safety.

Register to attend VSEA’s State House Day by [clicking here!](#)

Congress Votes To Delay Obamacare “Cadillac Tax” Implementation For Two Years

Congress added language to the budget bill this week that will delay implementation of an excise tax (billed the “Cadillac tax”) contained in Obamacare from 2018 until 2020, buying many organizations more time to prepare for the impact the tax will have on so-called “high-end” health care plans, which VSEA members’ plan is considered. In fact, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation, one in four employers expected to be adversely impacted by the tax’s implementation in 2018.

Speaking on behalf of most labor unions across the country, [AFL-CIO health care lobbyist Tom Leibfried tells the *Washington Post*](#) that this fight is not over, as working Americans will continue to lobby for outright repeal of the excise tax. This is because employers will still be forced to begin scaling back health plans in anticipation of the 2020 implementation of the tax, which Leibfried explains is the wrong way to be going, saying, “Increasing the workers’ pain through skimpier health plans is not the best way to target [the] problem. We are going to work to repeal the tax fully.”

Labor has been joined in lobbying against the Cadillac tax’s repeal by a large, diverse and bipartisan coalition, as the tax is expected to impact a large number of existing health care plans across the country.

This is further good news for VSEA members, as three Bargaining Units prepare to go to fact finding with the State in January. The Cadillac tax has been a serious concern of both sides.

Deadline Approaching! Looking To Fill Open Supervisory Unit Seat On VSEA Board Of Trustees

All full-fledged VSEA members who belong to the Supervisory Unit are eligible and are encouraged to submit a petition.

The process is easy:

- [Download and print a petition here;](#)
- Collect the names and original signatures of 25 full-fledged VSEA members on your petition; and
- Submit your completed petition to VSEA by **4:00 p.m., Monday, December 28.**

Looking To Fill Open Combined Unit Seat On VSEA Board Of Trustees

All full-fledged VSEA members who work for the Defender General’s Office and State Housing Authority are eligible and are encouraged to submit a petition.

The process is easy:

[Download and print a petition here;](#)

Collect the names and original signatures of 25 full-fledged VSEA members on your petition; and

Submit your completed petition to VSEA by **4:00 p.m., Monday, December 28.**

Subscribe To VSEA Today!

VSEA’s Communications Department is happy to disseminate any and all communications the leadership, Chapters, Units, and others request, however, the lists the Department currently pull from are provided to the union by the State of Vermont. VSEA’s Communications Department has found the lists to be dated, incomplete and sometimes lacking key information that was entered by a VSEA staff person but later overwritten or deleted during a State data dump.

To help VSEA more effectively reach active members—and really all those members who want to know what’s going on in their union—VSEA will be working hard in the coming months to collect members’ emails on its own and begin to build contact lists that cannot be altered by a State download.

You can help us get started by [clicking here](#) and signing up for the VSEA communications you are interested in receiving.

Thank you in advance for subscribing. Please urge your colleagues to do the same.

Want Instantaneous Push Notifications From Your Union? Sign Up Today For The VSEAUnite App!

With the 2016 legislative session fast approaching, VSEA is excited to be employing a new push notification tool to message members faster about important hearings, meetings, testimony, events and other union matters. Any member who has already downloaded the VSEAUnite App does not to do anything, but if you haven’t downloaded the free App yet, you can do so very easily.

VSEA’s Communications team is stressing that it will not be overloading members’ phones with push notifications. Members will also have the option to easily turn off the notifications, if the volume of notifications ever becomes an issue.

“We’ll be working in the coming weeks and months to increase the number of VSEA members using the VSEAUnite App, with an emphasis on getting a few users from each work site,” explains Communications Director Doug Gibson. “We’ll be aiming to limit the notifications to just information that is important to the entire VSEA membership, as opposed to Chapter- or Unit-specific messages, which, for the time being, will continue to be sent to members via email message.”

VSEAUnite is available for most mobile devices, including I-phone and Android. Once you download the App, you simply register with your name and your VSEA bargaining unit and location. VSEAUnite then allows you to view your Unit’s contract, find contact information for your nearest VSEA steward (to report contract infractions), see a calendar of upcoming VSEA events and read the latest news about working people to hit the wires.

The download is free, so your union hopes all VSEA I-phone, Android and other mobile users will download it today!

Quote Of The Week!

"It's a nice feeling to know that things are being done, but it's not enough at this point."

VSEA First VP Aimee Towne to a *WCAX* reporter who asked her to comment on the State’s recent announcement that, to address workers’ safety concerns, it was hiring more social workers and was conducting a full safety review of state buildings.

NMU Sick Leave Bank Needs Your Help! Please Donate Today!

VSEA member Dawn Carrillo staffs the Non-Management Unit Sick Leave Bank, and she asked *WIA* to remind NMU members that the deadline to donate a few hours to the sick leave bank is December 31.

“Just donating an hour of your time can mean the world to a fellow employee,” reads a flyer DHR sent out this week. It also informs state employees that 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 NMU Chairperson Michelle Salvador tells *WIA*. “Even if you only donate one hour to the bank, these one-hour donations add up. It’s so worthwhile because your donation is going to help a fellow state employee who is battling a serious illness.”

Advance Notice: Delta Dental Supplemental Plan Enrollment Forms Mailing In April 2016

VSEA members wanting to join Delta Dental’s Supplemental Program should keep an eye open for new enrollment forms in mid-April 2016, when the forms will begin arriving in all eligible VSEA members’ home mailboxes. The deadline to return your enrollment form will be in mid-May. Premium deductions from employee paychecks will begin in early June. The Supplemental Program’s new contract year begins July 1, 2016, and ends June 30, 2017.

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.

Upcoming Meetings/Events/Holidays:

December 21

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

December 23

Meet w/VSEA Director
Bennington State Office Building
Third Floor Shared Conference Room
11:45 a.m.

December 25

Christmas Day Holiday
Most State Offices & VSEA Closed

December 29

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

December 31

Deadline For NMU Members To Donate To Sick Leave Bank!
See *WIA* Post

January 1

New Years Day Holiday
Most State Offices & VSEA Closed

January 5

First Day – 2016 Vermont Legislative Session

January 6

VSCSF Executive Board Meeting

VSEA HQ

Montpelier

9:00 a.m.

January 7

Labor Educator's Monthly Meeting - Burlington

Conference Room 3A

108 Cherry St.

Burlington

January 8

NMU Executive Board Meeting

VSEA HQ

Montpelier

9:00 a.m.