



WEEK IN ACTION!

Weekly News From Your Union ~ February 15, 2016 – February 19, 2016

Three VSEA Bargaining Units Await Fact-Finder's Report

VSEA and thousands of members belonging to the Corrections, Non-Management and Supervisory Units are anxiously awaiting a fact finder's report, **which is due by February 25**, or before. After mediation failed to culminate in a contract, VSEA Bargaining Teams and State negotiators were forced in front of a fact finder, presenting him with all proposals on the table from both sides, and leaving it in his hands to come up with some kind of amalgamation of the proposals, or something else. What will be in the report is anyone's guess.

Once VSEA Teams review the report with staff negotiators to determine a lay of the land, the Teams can decide to either meet again with the State to see if a contract can come out of the fact-finder's report or agree to disagree and take the matter to the Vermont Labor Relations Firm.

VSEA will be updating members, after the Teams have had a chance to review the fact-finder's report and make a determination about next steps.

If you have a question, please contact a member of your Unit Bargaining Team. [Click here](#) for a list.

Vermont Becomes Fifth State To Pass Paid Sick Days Legislation

After a years-long effort by advocates, including VSEA and other Vermont unions, to win paid sick days for all working Vermonters, the General Assembly voted on February 17 to become the fifth state in the nation to pass legislation that grants workers three paid sick days a year for the first two years of the law being in effect and five days each year thereafter. The vote makes Vermont the fifth state in the nation to pass this kind of legislation.

After the bill passed, the Senate Pro Tem, House Speaker and State issued a joint statement that read:

"This legislation puts an end to an era where some Vermonters were faced with the decision of going to work sick or potentially losing their job. Many Vermont businesses do the right thing by offering paid sick days to their employees. This important right will now be extended to all Vermonters. That's the right thing to do for workers, businesses, and public health. We're proud that Vermont will become the fifth state to guarantee this important protection to its citizens."

"VSEA members fought for and won their right to paid sick leave, and it's a right the union believes all Vermont workers should enjoy, which is why VSEA's Legislative Committee has consistently included support for the bill as part of VSEA's legislative agenda," says VSEA Communications Director Doug Gibson. "This bill's passage is due in large part to great work by several organizations, including many Vermont labor unions, like the VSEA."

[VTDigger Story](#)

Still Time To Register For VSEA State House Day, Thursday, February 25, 2016!

Last call to register to attend VSEA's annual State House Day on Thursday, February 25, 2016. Each member attending will receive a free t-shirt to commemorate the day.

This event 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 and staffing.

Register to attend VSEA's State House Day by **clicking here!**

State House Events:

8:00 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.

Breakfast in the Cafeteria

Noon - 1:00 p.m.

VSEA Open Forum With Lawmakers
(House Chamber)

4:30 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

Legislative Reception in the Cafeteria

Capital Plaza Events:

10:00 a.m. – Noon

Council Meeting

1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Council/Committee Meeting

S. 154 (DCF Bill) Passes Out Of Key Senate Committee!

VSEA and its DCF members are cheering a 4-1 vote this week by the Senate Judiciary Committee to move S. 154; legislation to enhance the penalties for assaulting a DCF worker and criminalize the act of making threats.

The *Times Argus* published a story on February 18 about the “key” Committee’s vote, explaining that “Under the terms of the bill, DCF workers and mandated reporters will join the ranks of police officers, first responders and medical providers. Assaulting a member of any of these professions carries a stronger penalty than the assault of an average person on the street. The enhanced penalty for assaulting a mandated reporter would only be in effect if the assault is directly related to the act of making a DCF report.”

Sen. Dick Sears (D-Bennington) explained the importance of the bill’s provision that enhances the penalty for threatening someone to prevent that person from making a report to DCF, saying, “The whole idea behind this [provision] is to prevent what happened [to Lara Sobel].”

DCF Workers Advocate For Safety At Public Hearing On State Budget

On February 15, the House and Senate Committees On Appropriations held a series of public hearings across Vermont on the State’s proposed FY 2017 budget proposal. One of the five meetings was in Rutland, where a Vermont Press Bureau reporter was stationed and reported this:

“Two workers from the Department for Children and Families, Lisa Chapman and Laurie Bland, came to speak jointly about the governor’s recent pledge to put more money into DCF worker safety.

'That's wonderful,' but not enough, Bland said.

'In order to keep our vulnerable children and families safe, we need to feel safe,' she said.

The buildings need metal detectors and trained law enforcement, she said, along with secure parking lots. And with much of a case manager's work happening in home visits, Bland said, more needs to be done to ensure a worker's safety outside their offices.

'Part of our safety includes our workload,' Bland said."

VSEA thanks both DCF workers, and all other VSEA members in attendance, for taking the time to come and for making your voices heard—and the voices of your colleagues.

VSEA Files Grievance Over Smoking Ban On National Life "Campus." Issue Is Whose Work Rules Govern State Employees? Contractually Bargained Work Rules Or Those Of A Landlord?

Read AP Story Here: bit.ly/1KZddDX

Here is the full quote VSEA provided to AP:

"Earlier this week, VSEA mailed a grievance challenging this proposed change in working conditions to Human Resources Commissioner Spellman. Our grievance reminds that state employees' terms and conditions of employment, including work rules, are governed by the employees bargained contract; not dictated by an entity leasing property to the State. It also reminds that the State has an obligation to notice VSEA about proposed changes to working conditions, which did not happen here. Simply put, the blanket smoking policy National Life wants to implement on July 1 must be bargained with the VSEA. The Vermont Labor Relations Board has supported the VSEA's position in a prior attempt to change the smoking rules for a State workplace, and we are confident they will support our position again."

DHR responded with, "The state is a tenant to National Life and we follow the worksite rules set out by our landlord."

Feelings about smoking aside, this is an important grievance for state employees, especially since the State has been moving towards a leasing model in the past few years, making clarification on whose work rules prevail imperative.

Bennington Chapter Meeting Is February 22!

VSEA Bennington Chapter President Victoria Thorpe asked *WIA* to remind Chapter members that your next meeting is Monday, February 22, at the Bennington Free Library (upstairs), located at 101 Silver Street in Bennington. The meeting begins at 5:30 p.m., and food and beverages will be available.

Please RSVP to: coley10.4@hotmail.com.

Barre Chapter Cancels February 25 Meeting!

To avoid a conflict with VSEA's annual Legislative Reception on Thursday night, February 25, Barre Chapter President Sue LaFleche is cancelling a Chapter meeting she had scheduled for that day. Sue apologizes for any inconvenience and is encouraging all Barre Chapter members to attend VSEA's State House Day and/or Legislative Reception on Thursday.

VSEA Members At The St. Johnsbury Work Camp Being Urged To Attend Local Delegation's Next Breakfast With Constituents

VSEA is informing its members at the St. Johnsbury Work Camp about an upcoming constituent breakfast being hosted by area legislators. It will be a great opportunity for workers to share all the reasons the closure doesn't make sense with their legislators. The breakfast is being held Monday, February 29, beginning at 8:00 a.m. at the St. Johnsbury House, located at 1207 Main Street. Please note there is a small entry fee at the door.

Longtime VSEA AOT Activist Jerry Comstock Retires

VSEA Senior Union Representative Dave Van Duesen submitted this fitting tribute to Brother Comstock:

“This week, colleagues of longtime AOT Steward, Jerry Comstock (a recipient of a 2015 VSEA President's award) joined with him at the Central Garage in Berlin, where he's based, to celebrate his retirement.

Jerry started with the State in 1984, and in recent years he has been the go-to union activist at his worksite. In the past year alone, Jerry has actively participated in several union actions, including: signing the Fight Back Petition (Winter 2015), attending the Fight Back Rally (Spring 2015), signing the Dignity & Respect Petition (Summer 2015), and signing the “Garage Workers United For A Fair Contract” Petition (Fall, 2015). Jerry (along with fellow AOT Steward Nick Davis) also personally delivered the AOT petition to the Agency of Transportation Secretary (September, 2015), and used his own Annual Leave to support his NMU Bargaining Team (September, 2015).

Serving in recent years as Vice Chairman of the AOT Labor Management Committee, Jerry, along with Chairman Jason Heath, succeeded in securing a \$250 Retention Bonus for Plow Drivers and a guarantee for rank-and-file workers that they would have a seat on all Hiring Committees in AOT Operations.

At the end of the day, because of Jerry's leadership and hard work, he is leaving behind a stronger union than what he found in 1980s. And it's fitting that on his last day at work for the State, Jerry was representing a co-worker in an investigation. That is the kind of guy Jerry is. He will be missed.”

Ed Note: Thanks for everything Jerry! Dave is right. You will be missed. Congratulations!

NMU Bylaw Changes Due February 26!

Non-Management Unit Chairperson Michelle Salvador asked *WIA* to let NMU members know that the deadline to submit proposed Unit bylaw changes is **Friday, February 26**.

Proposals should reference the number, section, sub-section, etc. of the bylaw you would like to change. You should also include the language you want to add, delete or substitute. Also include the reason(s) you are making this proposal. Example: “Bylaw 0 A (1) (b) Change: Monday to Sunday. Reason: Makes it easier to work with the calendar.”

To view existing NMU bylaws, [click here](#).

VSEA Labor Educator's Winter/Spring 2016 Training Schedule

VSEA Labor Educator Tim Lenoach asked WIA to remind about the latest round of trainings he is conducting in the 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.

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

VSEA Insurance Representative In Middlebury Next Week

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

February 23 & 24

Vocational Rehabilitation Conference Room
Middlebury
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.

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!

“Rather than give public money to wealthy corporations, Vermont’s economic development strategy should focus on maintaining our quality public services. This is our comparative advantage.”

Two-term Vermont Senator Peter Galbraith, from a commentary he penned, titled “[Economic Justice Should Top Vermont’s Governor’s Race.](#)”

Important Reminder About Messages to the Legislature or the Public!

VSEA members are under attack, both at the bargaining table and in the Legislature, and members’ voices are the most powerful force we have. Members are already speaking out, particularly to legislators, so we need to remember some basic ground rules. [Click here](#) to view a memo that outlines some basic points about how to make sure your speech is protected. One of the key rules is this:

When you communicate with legislators, the media, or the public, make sure you are not on work time and don’t use the employer’s computer!

Nothing will undermine your message more effectively than the suspicion that you are using work time or the employer’s property for personal purposes. Electronic messages to lawmakers should originate from your personal email account and not from your state email account. The same goes for posting on websites or blogs. Send your messages from your personal email on break time, or pre- or post-work.

VSEA thanks all members for your attention to this request.

Joint Safety & Health Committee Posts “Complaint Form” To Gather Data From State Employees

For years, VSEA members and staff have served with management on a specially created Joint Safety and Health Committee, which meets periodically to discuss current safety and health issues impacting state employees, your worksites and/or the public. Committee members also strategize together about the best course of action to address a safety or health issue or concern, and they make recommendations to the State.

The Committee asked *WIA* to share that it has recently created [a new downloadable “complaint” form](#) for VSEA members to fill out and submit to the Committee if they are dealing with a safety or health issue and want to file an official complaint. The Committee will review all submitted forms at upcoming meetings to determine if action is warranted, and, if so, what kind of action is appropriate.

If you have any questions about the form, please contact VSEA's staff liaison to the Committee, Field Services Director Gretchen Naylor. You can email her at gnaylor@vsea.org or call her at 223-5247.

Deadline To Submit Bylaw Changes Is March 25!

The deadline to submit proposals for changes to VSEA's Master Bylaws is Friday, March 25, 2016. Proposals must be mailed to: Janis Henderson, Bylaws Committee Chair, c/o VSEA Headquarters, P.O. Box 518, Montpelier, VT 05601-0518.

Proposals should reference the number, section, sub-section, etc. of the bylaw you would like to change. You should also include the language you want to add, delete or substitute. Also include the reason(s) you are making this proposal. Example: "Bylaw 0 A (1) (b) Change: Monday to Sunday. Reason: Makes it easier to work with the calendar."

Please be sure the changes you are recommending include all Articles and/or Bylaws that may be affected by the proposed change.

If you have questions, please contact Janis at jhenderson@vsea.org.

VSEA Signs Popping Up! Help Needed With Distribution.

VSEA recently began distributing yard signs to leaders, activists and members, asking them to distribute them to family, friends, neighbors and businesses in their local communities. The signs are timed to coincide with what has unfortunately become very tough bargaining with the State on new contracts covering VSEA members in the Non-Management, Corrections, Supervisory and Judiciary Units.

The next few weeks and months will be critical, as VSEA members in three Units await a fact-finder's report, and Judiciary Unit members continue to combat seriously detrimental proposals. This is why VSEA is renewing its call to members to help your union with sign distribution, or post a sign in your own yard. Let's give Vermont a strong visual show of support for state employees and the quality public services you provide. **If you want a sign, but can't make it to Montpelier, please contact vsea@vsea.org, write "I need a sign(s)" in the subject line, and VSEA will do its best to get your one or more in a timely fashion.**

VSEA Chapter Presidents have developed a few simple talking points about the purpose of the signs, in case you need help explaining to a friend or business owner why state employees matter and why they should post a sign. They are:

- Vermont state employees are primarily Vermonters;
- Vermont state employees are your family, friends, neighbors;
- Vermont state employees live in communities across our state, and the wages we negotiate for with the State go back into our local communities to help keep them economically vibrant;
- Vermont state employees' negotiated wages and benefits raise the standard for all working Vermonters;
- For years, state employees have been asked to give back to help Vermont weather fiscal crises. Because of this, Vermont's quality public services are stretched very thin today and there just aren't enough employees in some areas to keep up with increased demand. State services and the workforce have been cut the marrow, not just the bone;
- Since Vermont leaders have chosen to rely heavily a tourism economy and seasonal employees, it makes employment in state government that much more desirable and also one of the last, viable jobs in Vermont still paying a living wage with fair health and retirement benefits. These are the kinds of jobs Vermont needs to support;
- By supporting state employees, you are supporting a continuation of the quality public services Vermonters have come to depend upon;

February 24

Meet w/VSEA Insurance Rep. Joanne Woodcock
Vocational Rehabilitation Conference Room
Middlebury
12:00 to 3:00

February 25

Council Meeting
Capital Plaza
Montpelier
9:00 a.m.

February 25

VSEA 2016 Legislative Reception
State House
Cafeteria
Montpelier
4:30 p.m.

February 25

Retirement Study Committee Meeting
VSEA HQ
Montpelier
1:00 p.m.