



WEEK IN ACTION!

Weekly News From Your Union ~ February 22, 2016 – February 26, 2016

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Fact Finder Asks For Short Extension

At the February 25 Council meeting, VSEA Labor Relations Director Gary Hoadley informed members that the fact finder reached out this week to VSEA and the State to ask for a few more days to complete his work on a final report, which both sides agreed was okay. **VSEA Bargaining Teams now expect to see the fact finder's report on Monday, February 29.**

The Corrections and Supervisory Bargaining Unit Teams will meet on March 2 with Hoadley to discuss the report's contents, and the NMU Bargaining Team will be meeting with him on March 4.

In preparation for the fact finder's report, Hoadley created this simple graphic to show members the two paths bargaining could follow, after the report is in hand.

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

VSEA Members Talk Budget Cuts & Bargaining Delays On State House Day 2016

VSEA members from across Vermont were at the State House for most of the day on February 25; your union's annual State House Day. The primary messages coming from many state employees in attendance were "stop the cuts" (once again), "safety and staffing" and "join us in calling on the State to return to the bargaining table with a fair offer."

The day began with a breakfast for members and lawmakers in the State House cafeteria, which offered a nice venue for frontline state employees to meet face to face with their local legislators to talk about the service they provide and the challenges they confront daily, especially when it comes to safety and staffing. Following breakfast, VSEA members in the building were able to talk more with their legislators, sit in on a committee meeting, or even watch one of the many press conferences being held by various groups throughout the day.

At noon, VSEA members already in the State House were joined by VSEA Council members, who were meeting across the street at the Capital Plaza. Everyone convened in the House Chamber, where they were addressed by several lawmakers, including Rep. Chris Pearson (P-Chittenden), Sen. Kevin Mullin (R-Rutland), Rep. Rachael Fields (D-Bennington), Sen. Anthony Pollina (D-Washington) and Speaker Shap Smith (D-Morrisville). **Of note was Smith's personal assurance to VSEA members that, regardless of the current standstill in contract negotiations, he will be including money in the budget to fund a COLA for state employees.** Smith told the crowd he believes the State should be at the table right now with VSEA, and that he will be telling this to State officials "the next time he sees them."

Following remarks by lawmakers, VSEA members took to the microphones to make their voices heard on several issues. Here's what was discussed and who discussed it:

- Chris Cosgrove (DOC Educator) – spoke about the essential services provided by educators working for the DOC's Community High School of Vermont, and how cutting this program to help offenders return to society as productive citizens is ill-advised and counter to the DOC's own mission statement;
- Michelle Salvador (DOH, but representing Risk Management Division employees) – spoke about stopping RMD management from its current effort to solicit bids from private contractors to take

over this historically state-provided service. Workers say switching the service to a private vendor will result in a reduction of services for Vermonters. Workers also remind that Vermonters serving Vermonters is always better than some out-of-state firm handling claims for the State.

- Barbara King (VVH) – spoke about keeping the Vets’ Home state-run and how wrong it is for the Vets’ Home to have to beg year after year for the funding necessary to ensure Vermont’s veterans are receiving the level of care they earned and deserve. She also spoke out against a proposal for the Vets’ Home to begin caring for some incarcerated veterans, and a plan to convert the facility from State- to federally run; and
- Gary Guyer (St. Johnsbury Work Camp) – spoke about the economic impact to the St. Johnsbury community if the Work Camp is closed. Work crews dispatched from the facility are responsible for many projects in the community and their labor is a money saver.

After the hour-long forum ended, VSEA members continued throughout the afternoon to meet personally with lawmakers and sit in on relevant committee meetings. At 4:30 p.m., the annual VSEA Legislative Reception got started in the State House cafeteria, and lawmakers and VSEA members were able to meet and talk, while enjoying some food and drink.

[Click here](#) to view photos from VSEA’s 2016 State House Day.

VSEA Activist Spotlight: Mike Arace

Periodically, WIA will profile an activist who is helping build your union and make it stronger.

Mike Arace
Correctional Specialist 2
Probation & Parole - Brattleboro

When news of Lara Sobel’s murder reached Correctional Service Specialist Mike Arace in Brattleboro, it really hit home. That’s because he and his colleagues working in Probation and Parole (P&P) offices across Vermont often face many of the same potentially dangerous situations as social workers with the Department for Children and Families, especially when conducting home visits. In fact, VSEA P&P Field Staff members feel so strongly about the need to be protected while at work that they are circulating a petition to allow them to carry a firearm, if they choose, and Arace is one of the workers leading the signature gathering effort.

“Since I started with P&P in 2005, the job’s dangers and an employee’s ability to defend him or herself have been a topic of discussion for employees,” explains Arace. “Field staff has an extremely challenging and dangerous job to do. There is an inherent risk each time we meet with an offender. When we are making contact with them in the community and in their homes, we are on ‘their turf’, and they play by their own set of rules. We need the tools to keep ourselves safe.”

Arace reports that the petition is chugging along, gaining enough support now to give him the confidence to say a majority of P&P workers support the initiative and want to take things to the next level, which is to hopefully meet with the Corrections Commissioner and with lawmakers to talk about what’s behind the petition.

“We’ll be asking the Commissioner to review our petition and then use her authority to draft protocol and policy that permits P&P Field Staff to arm ourselves, if we choose,” says Arace. “We also want to meet with key lawmakers to discuss our petition and gain their support. The final step will be to pass legislation that allows trained and certified staff working outside of a secure institution to be armed.”

Arace says he decided to help lead the petition effort because it’s something he believes strongly in and because he got tired of hearing his colleagues complaining about the danger but then not doing anything about it.

“There are plenty of naysayers who tell me that this has been done before and no one listens,” he explains. “But I attempt to explain to them that this is the first step in an ‘action plan’ and, even though this has been a topic of discussion for years, there has never been any real action. If you want something to change you have to do something about it, not just complain. I am not one to complain and not take action.”

Arace, who is also a VSEA Steward, employs this same philosophy when he encounters a VSEA member who is not happy with the union, or something that happened within the union.

“Most of the time, it’s a lack of knowledge and understanding... some have never even read their contract” he says. “Too many frontline workers don’t know what VSEA is or does, so I tell them to get involved—in any way they can.” He continues, “I remind them that the union is only as strong as its members and that ‘we are the union.’ You do have voice. Your opinion does matter. People will listen to you. You just have to voice your concerns or opinions appropriately and in the right setting. Go to meetings, vote, join a committee, be a Steward, read the *WIA*, or talk to your local Union Representative.”

Finally, Arace says that in addition to his petition signature gathering, he’s also been closely monitoring the progress of VSEA’s negotiations with the State on a new contract, and he’s not happy with what’s he’s heard and seen.

“The State’s posturing right now is absurd,” he says. “There is a bargaining process for a reason, and there is no reason the State should not want to be at the table right now and try to reach a fair agreement with its employees. VSEA never went to the table with an unreasonable request. This is a typical power struggle, and management is bullying from the very top. It’s my understanding VSEA is—and has always been—willing to negotiate to find common ground that is good for both sides. It appears the State does not see it this way and has the attitude of ‘my way or no way.’ It is an elementary temper tantrum, and I think they should be ashamed. We are the people who make this state work and who follow their directions. I would think that you would want to keep your employees happy and at least be willing to talk to them. That is just good business.”

VSEA Member Prevails At VLRB

VSEA learned this week that the Vermont Labor Relations Board (VLRB) ruled to overturn an employee’s termination, saying the State violated the collective bargaining agreement by delaying any action on the employee’s discipline for almost a year. The VLRB added that the State’s delay is evidence that the discipline imposed was initially too harsh.

VSEA General Counsel Tim Belcher says this case was especially egregious because the employee did not even learn s/he was being investigated--nor was s/he put on temporary relief of duty--until unexpectedly receiving a Loudermill letter. Belcher also applauded and thanked past VSEA Associate General Counsel Justin St. James for his work on the case, prior to leaving VSEA.

Great job VSEA Legal Team!

REMINDER! VSEA Members At The St. Johnsbury Work Camp Being Urged To Attend Local Delegation’s Feb. 29 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.

Here are some talking points for VSEA members who might be asked about the State’s proposal to shutter the Work Camp.

- Vermont still houses hundreds of our inmates in out-of-state, private, for-profit prisons, so closing down space in a viable Vermont DOC facility that could be used to house some of these inmates doesn't make economic sense. Keep the dollars here in Vermont, where they are needed, and keep Vermonters working, especially here in the NEK.
- Workers estimate the closing of the Work Camp will result in a loss of \$5 million to the local St. Johnsbury community, primarily because work once performed by DOC work crews (at significant savings) will no longer be done. Things like building maintenance, repair and construction, mowing and landscaping, line clearing, wood processing and sign making. The local community would have to contract for many of these services, and costs will increase, some greatly.
- The vocational rehabilitation being offered to inmates by employees at the Work Camp helps ensure Vermont's stated mission to return our inmates to our communities as productive members of society is being fulfilled. Remember, some inmates passing through the Work Camp are learning a vocation for the first time in their life, and workers confident their services are helping them learn the skills and discipline needed to give something back to their local Vermont communities.

Note: The image above is a sticker VSEA handed out to members attending this week's State House Day.

For Risk Management Division Workers, The Waiting Is The Hardest Part

Nearly a dozen VSEA members working in the State's Risk Management Division have been publicly contesting management's decision to openly shop their services (workers' comp, liability and safety) to private vendors, and they were poised to begin comparing what they do with whichever vendor prevailed after bids were open on February 25—but then that date got changed at the last minute.

"VSEA was set to attend the bid opening to see how many bidders there were and what they were offering, but then this week we learned that the date to bid was being extended to March 17," explains VSEA Communications Director Doug Gibson. "It stinks because it just prolongs what has already been a very unsettling period for these workers. They would like to have a comparison of services in hand before the legislature adjourns, so they can continue to make their case—hopefully, an even stronger one—against privatization to lawmakers. The delay is really, really unfortunate, and VSEA will be in the room on March 17, which is hopefully when this unneeded bidding process will end."

VSEA Executive & Organizing Directors Visiting Southeast State Next Week

VSEA Executive Director Steve Howard and newly hired Organizing Director Vinnie O'Connor will be at the Southeast State Correctional Facility in Springfield on **Friday, March 4**, to meet with workers there and talk about their issues and concerns. Steve and Vinnie will be in the facility's Staff Lounge, beginning at **9:00 a.m.**, so stop by, introduce yourself and let your union know what's on your mind.

Monday Is Deadline For AOE Members To Complete Survey

AOE representatives who sit on the Labor/Management Team are urging their colleagues to complete an important worker survey by **Monday, February 29!** To date, more than 50 surveys have been completed, but the Team is looking for as many more as possible by Monday.

Your Team wants to learn more from each of you about things like day-to-day operations, workplace morale, "uniformity" and interaction with management, so it created a survey to learn what's important to you.

Please take some time soon to complete this eight-question survey. Your Team will be using your

answers to guide its work moving forward.

The Team thanks you in advance for your participation and help.

Note: A link to the survey was emailed to AOE VSEA members this week. If you don't remember receiving it, please check your spam filter as well, to ensure it didn't get flagged.

No Room In Brand New Waterbury Complex?

Just a short time after cutting the ribbon to open the new \$130 million Waterbury State Office Complex, the [February 25 Stowe Reporter](#) published a story about the State now being forced to find additional space for some AHS workers. BGS did not respond to the reporter's inquiry about the situation.

According to the story, "the former Keurig Green Mountain call center at 152 S. Main St. is being converted to additional state offices that will house roughly 75 workers from the state Department of Human Services."

The impacted AHS workers will make their move to Waterbury from Williston in March.

Headquarters Staff Update!

Here's some recent staff additions and promotions for members to note:

- Legislative Specialist Nancy Lynch (nlynch@vsea.org) was recently promoted to Legislative Director, and Tom Abdelnour (tabdelnour@vsea.org) was hired to be the new Legislative Specialist. VSEA is also pleased to welcome VSEA Legislative Intern Danielle ????, who is learning the ropes this session at the State House;
- Vinnie O'Connor (voconnor@vsea.org) has been hired to be your union's new Organizing Director, and he comes to VSEA with an impressive resume that includes work with many unions, primarily in the west; and
- VSEA administrative staff person Nikolas Stein has been promoted to the position of Union Representative, and he will begin work in his new territories on Monday, February 29.

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 Training: Green Mountain Psychiatric Care

Wednesday, March 2
VTrans Training Center
1716 U.S. Rte. 302
Berlin

Steward 1: Introduction & The Basics

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

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

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!

“The growth of the problems is outpacing our ability to manage them and help families respond.”

VSEA DCF Caseworker Alyssa Dawson, responding to a WPTZ reporter’s a question about the reality confronting her and hundreds of other frontline DCF workers. [See the Feb. 25 story here.](#)

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;

Are The Police Involved At All In This Incident?

If you are a state employee who is threatened on the job, please click [here](#) to find the online report form, **which will remain confidential**, unless otherwise approved by you.

Upcoming Meetings/Events/Holidays:

February 29

St. Johnsbury Legislative Delegation Breakfast

Attn: VSEA Work Camp Employees

The St. Johnsbury House

St. Johnsbury

8:00 a.m.

March 2

Corrections/Supervisory Bargaining Team Meeting

Large Board Room

VSEA HQ

Montpelier

9:00 a.m

March 2

Steward Training: Green Mountain Psychiatric Care

VTrans Training Center

1716 U.S. Rte. 302

Berlin

9:00 a.m.

March 3

Budget Committee Meeting

Small Board Room

VSEA HQ

Montpelier

9:00 a.m

March 4

NMU Bargaining Team Meeting

Large Board Room

VSEA HQ

Montpelier

9:00 a.m

March 4

Steward Training 1: Intro & Basics

VTrans Training Center

1716 U.S. Rte. 302

Berlin

9:00 a.m.

March 4

VSEA ED & OD Meeting

Southeast State

Springfield

9:00 a.m.