



WEEK IN ACTION!

Weekly News From Your Union ~ May 2 – May 6, 2016

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VSEA Press Release Praises DCF Workers Tribute To Colleague, While Reemphasizing Union's Commitment To Enhanced Employee Safety & Security

VSEA released the following on May 11:

Mixed in with dozens of other teams running in tonight's Corporate Cup in Montpelier will be several teams of state employees, representing Department for Children and Families' Family Services Division offices across Vermont, including one from the Barre DCF office, where Social Worker Lara Sobel was based and where she was tragically killed by a client in August 2015. All the teams will be wearing purple (Sobel's favorite color) t-shirts, reading "Lara Sobel Strong" and "In Memory Of Lara Sobel. We Will Never Forget."

"The employees came up with this idea, and I think it's a great tribute to Lara Sobel and to the service that she and all these DCF workers provide to Vermont's children every day,' said VSEA President Dave Bellini, who adds that many of the VSEA DCF members running tonight were also at the State House this past session, helping VSEA get legislation (S. 154) passed to better protect frontline DCF workers while on the job. 'Getting this bill passed was good news, but there is still a lot of work to be done. VSEA members throughout state government have made it clear to me and to the VSEA Board of Trustees that employee safety and security must continue to be a top priority for our union. I say continue because this is an issue that VSEA members have been talking and testifying about for years, but, unfortunately, it took the death of a state employee to really begin a serious discussion in Vermont about how to address employee safety and security issues and concerns. Safety and security is a priority not only for frontline state workers but also for the Vermonters who use public services every day, which is a lot of us.'

Bellini reminded that Lara Sobel's parents recently dedicated a bench in Montpelier to their daughter's memory. A plate on the bench reads: 'Dedicated In Loving Memory To Our Daughter, Lara Kim Sobel, A Committed Advocate For The Children Of Vermont.' The bench is located on State Street."

Lara Sobel's Parents Honor Daughter

Thanks to DCF Family Services Division staff for sending these pictures to VSEA of a new bench in Montpelier that has a placard reading:

"Dedicated In Loving Memory To Our Daughter, Lara Kim Sobel, A Committed Advocate For The Children Of Vermont."

The bench was installed late last week by Lara's parents, and runners in the Corporate Cup in Montpelier passed it as they completed the course last night.

Lovely tribute.

VSEA Special All-Steward Summit Training Is Next Friday In Waterbury!

VSEA Stewards from worksites across Vermont will be in Waterbury on Friday, May 20, to participate in the VSEA Steward Summit Training 2016. VSEA Stewards are regular frontline workers who want to ensure fairness by being a member's first line of defense when s/he is confronted with a workplace personnel or work-related issue

Throughout the day, Stewards and VSEA officers and staff will be collectively exploring ways to improve public services, strengthen our contracts, and build our Union. There will be breakout sessions and workshops by Bargaining Unit, Department and Field Territory. A group dinner is being planned for the evening of May 19.

Best Western Waterbury: 802-244-7822

Questions about the summit? Contact Tim Lench: tlenoch@vsea.org

VSEA Legislative Team Issues Preliminary 2016 Session Wrap

VSEA's Legislative team asked WIA to include the following:

The 2016 legislative session was a successful and productive one for VSEA members. After months of aggressive lobbying and VSEA member testimony in many committees, VSEA achieved dozens of victories for members, and suffered one disappointing defeat.

At the upcoming June Council meeting, your Legislative team will be distributing an issue-by-issue, comprehensive review of the legislative session, but, in advance, here is a small sampling of a few of the session's major highlights:

Increased Safety and Security for State Employees

The Legislative team fought continuously to bring about statutory changes that will help keep state employees safe in their work. We successfully lobbied to ensure that this year's budget includes **funds for the family of Lara Sobel**, and that her daughters' access to health care and higher education will be secure. We ensured passage of **S. 154**, which **increases penalties for assaults** on any DCF employee, and introduces criminal penalties for certain types of threats. Another new bill, **H. 74**, requires **safety protocols** to be implemented across **all departments and programs of the Agency of Human Services**. This year's budget includes new **funding for safety and security improvements**, as outlined below.

The Budget

This session's budget:

- **Fully funds year one of the Pay Act** (the statute that facilitates funding for state employee contracts. In this case, VSEA's last best contract offer of 2% in year one, which was recently approved by the Labor Board). The total cost of the year-one wage increase and steps combined is \$9.7 million. The Pay Act also requires the State to reduce overtime costs by \$300,000;
- **Includes \$500,000 in security funding** from the General Fund for state government;
- **One million dollars was included in the Capital Bill** for building security upgrades;
- **Adds 45 new permanent, classified positions;**
- **Reduces funding for exempt positions by \$500,000;**
- **Requires the Department of Corrections to reach an agreement to continue the operations of the St. Johnsbury Work Camp**, and funds the Camp's operations;
- **Funds the Community High School of Vermont;** a rejection of the State's proposal to cut this vital program;

- **Fully funds the Vermont Veterans' Home** and includes a requirement that the Home submit a report about its use of temporary workers, awarding of overtime and record of call outs;
- Includes funding for **35 new positions in the Department for Children of Families and Office of the Defender General**, as part of a child-protection package to address increased caseloads;
- **Privatizes the Office of Risk Management**;
- Adds the Department of Corrections, the Agency of Natural Resources, and the Department of Labor to **the "Position-Pilot" Program**; a successful program that allows agencies and departments to **hire more classified employees** to reduce reliance on temporary workers and mandated overtime;
- Mandates that E911 Public Safety Answering Points (**PSAPs**) **continue to be State-run**, unless otherwise directed by the Legislature; and
- Includes a **\$600,000 funding increase for the Vermont State Colleges**;

Fighting Privatization

VSEA launched an unprecedented lobbying campaign in a concerted and wide-ranging effort to save the **Office of Risk Management**. This effort included member testimony in four committees across both legislative chambers, hundreds of member phone calls as the result of multiple action alerts, a dinner reception at VSEA where members had the opportunity to speak directly with lawmakers, and an action in the Well of the House, attended by a wide range of legislators, where the Chair of the NMU made the case against the privatization of the Office. Furthermore, the Legislative Department aggressively lobbied to have statutory language added to multiple bills, and arranged for amendments to be offered on the floor of both chambers to fight the privatization. We offered rebuttals to the Administration's arguments up until the final hour of the Budget Committee on Conference's deliberations. Despite this coordinated, wide-ranging, and comprehensive effort, unfortunately the final version of the budget includes language that takes \$500,000 out of the Office, assuming that it will be privatized. VSEA continues to meet with the Administration in an effort to stop this fast-moving train, and we will continue to keep members informed on our efforts to save this Office.

As the budget was about to reach the Senate Floor, Sen. Claire Ayer introduced a shock amendment to privatize the Vermont Veterans' Home. The Legislative Department furiously lobbied to kill this shock amendment. We were successful; **the Amendment died**.

VSEA became concerned that E911 call taking would be privatized. The Legislative Department worked to attach language to a variety of statutory vehicles to bar PSAP privatization. This included amendments to H. 870 (a telecom bill) and H. 130. This amendment, submitted to the telecom bill by Rep. Michael Marcotte made its way into the budget. **E911 call taking must now remain in the Department of Public Safety unless an act of the legislature determines otherwise**.

The Legislative Department, in cooperation with members of the Legislative Committee, VSEA retirees, and the members of the legislature's Working Vermonters' Caucus managed to **remove language calling for "private/public partnerships"** in the construction of corrections facilities from the Capital Bill.

For a more comprehensive rundown of the wide range of legislative issues tackled this year, be sure to catch Legislative Committee Chair Margaret Crowley's point-by-point legislative summary at this June's Council meeting. We hope to see you there!

VSEA Member Candidates Sought For Three Board Of Trustees' District Seats

Petitions are now available online for VSEA members interested in running for one of these three VSEA District Board seats:

District 1 - Barre & Central Vermont

District 2 - Waterbury & Vermont Psychiatric Care Hospital

District 5 - Rutland & Bennington

To be eligible for election to one of these Districts, a member must reside or have an assigned workstation--and continue to reside or have an assigned workstation--in the respective District.

If interested, you must be a member in good standing, and you must collect the signatures of 25 or more full, dues-paying VSEA members.

Click here for a petition: <http://bit.ly/1Nofcmz>

The deadline to submit your petition is Wednesday, June 1, 2016!

If you are unable to access a petition online, please contact VSEA headquarters at 223-5247 to request to have a hard copy petition mailed to your home.

VSEA Member Reminds About VSEA-Negotiated Organ Donation Language

VSEA member Janet Overstreet asked WIA to share this reminder:

Back in 2008, VSEA was proud to honor state employee Janet Suker (now Janet Overstreet) for her selfless donation of a kidney to fellow state employee Dave DeBoer. If you don't remember, Suker donated her kidney to DeBoer in December 2007 after a chance meeting between the two employees earlier in the year. Suker and DeBoer had worked in the same office building for years but did not know each other. However, after meeting one day about a work issue, Suker learned of DeBoer's need for a new kidney, asked him his blood type (which was also hers) and offered him one of her kidneys.

(Photo: Pictured here in 2007 are Janet Suker and Dave DeBoer. Sadly, Dave passed away on August 21, 2013. He is missed.)

While contemplating her decision to donate a kidney to DeBoer, Suker discovered that, unlike the federal government and many states across the country, Vermont did not have a law that grants employees 30 days paid leave to be living organ donors. This was important to her because, as a relatively new state employee, Suker had just two weeks of leave on the books, and her doctors were recommending she take a full 30 days to recuperate. Because Vermont did not have the law at the time of her donation, Suker returned to work after just 12 days.

“When I learned that Vermont did not have this 30-day, paid-leave law, I asked Dave and VSEA to help me get the law passed here,” explained Suker. “And thanks to everyone's efforts, we succeeded!”

In 2008, VSEA signed a side letter with the State that reads:

- A permanent or limited status classified State employee shall be granted leave without loss of pay or seniority, or charge to accrued leave balances, not to exceed thirty work days, in the aggregate, for necessary absences directly related to the actual donation of a human organ for transplant, any required preparation for the donation procedure, and recovery therefrom. However, such leave may be delayed or denied in an emergency if the employee's service is determined by the Commissioner of Human Resources to be indispensable to the continued health or safety of the public;
- A permanent or limited status classified State employee shall be granted leave without loss of pay or seniority, or charge to accrued leave balances, not to exceed five work days, in the

aggregate, for necessary absences directly related to the actual donation of bone marrow for transplant, any required preparation for the donation procedure, and recovery therefrom. Such leave shall only be granted once in a twelve-month period, which shall commence on the first day such leave is used. However, such leave may be delayed or denied in an emergency if the employee's service is determined by the Commissioner of Human Resources to be indispensable to the continued health or safety of the public;

- Requests for organ or bone marrow donation leave shall be made only by the employee who is serving as the donor and must be submitted to the applicable appointing authority. Such requests should be submitted at least four weeks in advance of the anticipated start of the leave, in writing, unless a shorter notice period is medically necessary, and shall include documentation from the employee's medical practitioner that authenticates the donation. Failure to submit authenticating documentation from the medical practitioner will result in denial of the requested leave;
- "Organ" shall mean: a human organ, including an eye, that is capable of being transferred from the body of one person to the body of another person, such as a lung, kidney, liver, or other organ that requires the continuous circulation of blood to remain useful for purposes of transplantation; and
- "Bone Marrow" shall mean: the soft material that fills human bone cavities.

To learn more about organ donation in Vermont, visit: <http://bit.ly/24S4BZ1> State Holds Ceremony To Honor “Outstanding” State Employees & State Employee Teams During Public Service Recognition Week

Help VSEA Reach 2000 Likes!

VSEA's Communications Department thanks every VSEA member who has “liked” your union's Facebook page to date. It's another resource for VSEA members to use to learn more about what's happening in your union, recent victories and fights, member, Chapter and Unit volunteer efforts, community-building efforts, VSEA in the news and so much more. Just in the past year, we've added more than 1,000 new “likes” to the page, and now we're closing in on 2,000, sitting today at 1929.

Help us reach 2000. If you are a Facebook user but have yet to visit and “like” your union's Facebook page, you can do so [here!](#)

Thanks to everyone for your Facebook solidarity and support.

***Waterbury Record* Reports State Employees “Happy” With New Building Complex**

Fine months after moving in, the May 12 *Waterbury Record* reports that state employees are adjusting well to new space in the State Office Building Complex. The story quotes several employees, including AHS worker Laurie Hurlburt, who compliments how easy the transition has been and another, and DCF worker Diane Chapin, saying “how good it is to see old friends.”

Read the full story [here](#).

VSEA Awards & Scholarships Committee Wants YOU!

This week, two VSEA members and one retiree met to review more than 40 applications submitted for one of seven scholarship awards VSEA will be awarding at the June Council meeting. It's a lot of work, and the Committee could use some help, especially from members with an interest in helping your union promote and advance its popular awards and scholarship program.

Some of the Committee's primary duties include:

- Promoting the VSEA Awards and Scholarshili programs to the VSEA membership;

- Annually reviewing the criteria for awards and scholarships to work with objective criteria; and
- Recommending ideas for new awards, as appropriate, to the VSEA Board of Trustees.

If you would be interested in joining this Committee, or learning more about it, please contact the Committee's staff liaison Kris Lizzari, who can be reached by email at klizzari@vsea.org, or by phone at 223-5247.

Franklin/Grand Isle Chapter Meeting Is May 18

VSEA's Franklin/Grand Isle Chapter President Michael Gordon asked *WIA* to let Chapter members know that the Chapter's next meeting is Wednesday, May 18, beginning at 5:00 p.m. at 14th Star Brewery, 133 N. Main Street in St. Albans.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Chapter President Michael Gordon by email at michael.gordon@vsea.org.

VSEA Policies Now Available Online

Wondering about a VSEA policy and want to look it up online? Now you can.

VSEA's website now has a page listing your union's governing policies, and members with "member-only" website access can review any or all of them by [clicking here](#).

Again, note that in order to view the policies on www.vsea.org, you must first be a registered user of the union's website, which will then grant you "member-only" status. If you are not a registered user of VSEA's website, you can [click here](#) to sign up today. If you are not a registered user, you will receive an "Access Denied" message when trying to view the updates.

Article Reminds That "Americans Don't Miss Manufacturing—They Miss Unions"

An article that posted today to fivethirtyeight.com talks about how Americans are being misled by politicians who boast about "rebuilding our nation's manufacturing base" to help the U.S. economy rebound. Here are some excerpts:

Candidates talk about manufacturing because of what it represents in the popular imagination: a source of stable, well-paying jobs, especially for people without a college degree. But that image is rooted more in nostalgia than in reality. Manufacturing no longer plays its former role in the economy, and not only because there are far fewer factory jobs than in the past. The jobs being created today often pay less than those of the past — sometimes far less."

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Why do factory workers make more in Michigan? In a word: unions. The Midwest was, at least until recently, a bastion of union strength. Southern states, by contrast, are mostly "right-to-work" states where unions never gained a strong foothold. Private-sector unions have been shrinking across the country for decades, but they are stronger in the Midwest than in most other parts of the country. In Michigan, 23 percent of manufacturing production workers were union members in 2015; in South Carolina, less than 2 percent were.²

Unions also help explain why the middle class is healthier in the Midwest than in the Southeast, where manufacturing jobs have been growing rapidly in recent decades. A [new analysis](#) from the Pew Research Center this week explored the state of the middle class in different parts of the country by looking at the share of households making between two-thirds and double the national median income, after controlling for the local cost of living. In many Midwestern cities, 60 percent or more of households are considered "middle-income" by this definition; in some Southern cities, even those with large manufacturing bases, middle-income households are now in the minority.

New NLRB Rules To Shorten Wait For Workers Trying To Organize Are Working

On April 14, 2015, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) issued new rules targeted at reducing the amount of time workers had to wait to conduct an election, after collecting the required number of petition signatures. Workers had long sought the new rules, complaining that forcing people to wait an average of 38 days to conduct an election gave the employer too much time to pollute the organizing process. Analysis out this week shows that the new NLRB rules have dropped the wait time by 14 days to 24 days, which is good news.

However, analysis on the impact of the shortened waiting time on election results showed that, prior to the new NLRB rules being enacted, workers voted for union representation 65% of the time, but, in the first year of the new rules, the win rate rose just one percent to 66%.

Business groups had opposed the new rules, also known as “quickie election” rules, fearing organized labor would use the expedited process to hurry voting, which would deny employers the chance to make the case against union representation.

AFT Researcher Creates Website To Publicize Union Busters

Back in mid-March, *WIA* informed readers about the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) announcing a final version of a new rule that requires employers to acknowledge any indirect “persuading” to thwart a union organizing campaign, done for the employer by a lawyer or consultant, which the rule refers to as “contentious persuaders.”

Now an American Federation of Teachers (AFT) researcher has created a new website to publicize any and all filings made under the NLRB’s new rule. The recently launched "[Union Buster Alerts](#)," allows users to access new filings by management consultants and law firms about their roles in anti-union campaigns. Users can subscribe to weekly alerts that "contain a table of unions, employers, union busters, addresses, and links," the website says. The website is not affiliated with or funded by any outside organization, including AFT.

VSEA To Conduct Gubernatorial Straw Polls

In order to provide your VSEA Board of Trustees with better insight on how VSEA members feel about all the declared candidates for Governor in 2016, the union’s Legislative Committee will be conducting two electronic straw polls for members to participate in; one before the primary election and another before the general election. The Board of Trustees governs VSEA’s political process, so input to the body from as many members as possible is very important.

IMPORTANT!! In order for a member to participate in the straw polls, VSEA must have an updated home email address for the member. VSEA cannot send emails of a political nature, such as the straw poll announcement, to state email addresses. If you are unsure, or don’t remember ever providing VSEA with your home email, please take time today to submit your name and home email address to VSEA@VSEA.org (please write “Home Email” in the subject space) To ensure you can vote, VSEA need this information no later than May 20, 2016.

The first electronic straw poll will be conducted in early June. Keep an eye on *WIA* for updates, but for now, send us those home email addresses.

Membership Recruitment Committee Looking To Reinvigorate VSEA Advantage Discount Program. Soliciting Member Input!

VSEA members belonging to your union’s Membership Recruitment Committee are actively working to reinvigorate the VSEA Advantage Discount Program; a popular member benefit that provides state employees with special discounts to Vermont and national businesses and services.

“The Committee is really interested in hearing from members right now about what new businesses and services you would like to see added to the program, from all across Vermont,” explains Membership Recruitment Committee Chair Katelyn Chase. “We want to learn more about where VSEA members shop and where you use services? We also want to find out what kinds of leisure and recreational activities you enjoy, which will let us target vendors who are offering goods and services that are important to VSEA members.”

VSEA members are urged to send your ideas and thoughts to Katelyn at kchase@vsea.org. Please write “Advantage Program” in the subject line.

“The Committee is really hoping to roll out a beefed-up Advantage Program soon, so keep an eye on future *Week In Actions* for progress updates and announcements of new vendors offering discounts,” adds Chase. “Thanks everyone for sending us your ideas.”

Note: The VSEA Advantage Discount Program is open to all members currently paying full dues to the union. A majority of participating businesses do require state employees to present their green VSEA membership card as verification of their full-fledged union status. In the future, VSEA will be making presentation of the card mandatory in order to receive a discount. If you do not have a green membership card, and you are paying full dues to VSEA, please contact Ayla Hudson at ahudson@vsea.org to be verified and receive a card. Thank you.

Bolton Valley Already Offering VSEA Members Deeply Discounted 2016-2017 Season Pass Rates

Bolton Valley Ski Resort has been a participating member of the VSEA Advantage Discount Program for years, offering full-fledged VSEA members and their families discounted day and season passes.

Even though the 2015-2016 ski season isn't over quite yet, Bolton is already offering VSEA members an early-bird special deal on a 2016-2017 season pass. This is special pricing that Bolton Valley is offering on a trial basis to gauge Vermonters' interest in purchasing a pass way ahead of time if the price is deeply discounted.

Bolton is offering an adult “All-Access” season pass for \$269 to VSEA members. This is a \$230 savings per pass from last year. This price is good until October 31, 2016. Youth passes (\$159) include an added discount that Bolton will stop offering on April 4, 2016, so, if interested, book these sooner, not later.

[Click here](#) to order your pass(es) today! On the page, you'll find a list of prices and instructions to order. Members will need a promo code at the time of checkout, which will apply discounts to the full price passes. VSEA's promo code is 51VSEA.

VSEA First Vice President Looking To Fill Vacant Council Seats

VSEA First Vice President Aimee Towne asked *WIA* to remind members about several open seats on the VSEA Council.

You can find a self-nominating form by [clicking here](#). (opens/ downloads as a PDF)

With more than 120 VSEA members, the VSEA Council is one of your union's primary governing bodies and its largest and most diverse, with departmental representatives from across state government. The Council meets quarterly and retains a right to override decisions made by the VSEA Board of Trustees.

Questions? Please contact VSEA Administrative Assistant Ayla Hudson at 802-223-5247, or by email at ahudson@vsea.org.

Quote Of The Week!

"It's a fitting tribute where people can enjoy themselves, enjoy their lives, enjoy a moment just sitting there, maybe also just reflecting for a moment on the service that our social workers provide to the state, keeping our children safe"

VSEA Executive Director Steve Howard to [FOX44 in a May 11 story](#) the station aired about Lara Sobel's parents installing a new bench on State Street and dedicating it to their daughter's memory and her legacy of helping children.

Threatened While On The Job? VSEA Wants To Know.

VSEA President Dave Bellini is asking all state employees who are threatened while performing your job duties to provide an account of the threat not only to your supervisor or the State, but also to VSEA.

"VSEA wants to begin to compile its own record of threats against frontline state employees, no matter your occupation," explains Bellini. "I'm asking all employees who are threatened, especially those working in AHS, to take a few minutes to fill out an online form VSEA made to collect your report. The information will help us provide a firsthand account of the number of threats being made and where they are being made, in addition to some other things."

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:

May 17

Child & Elder Care Committee Meeting
VSEA HQ
Montpelier
9:00 a.m.

May 18

Franklin/Grand Isle Chapter Meeting
14th Star
133 N. Main St.
St. Albans
5:00 a.m.

May 20

VSEA Steward Summit Training
All Stewards Invited!
Best Western Hotel
Waterbury
9:00 a.m.

May 20

Special Events Committee Meeting
VSEA HQ
Montpelier
9:00 a.m.

May 20

Legislative Sub-Committee Meeting
VSEA HQ
Montpelier
9:00 a.m.