

VSEA CANDIDATE SURVEY: BECCA BALINT  
DISTRICT: WINDHAM COUNTY

1.) Yes! The work of Vermont State government should be performed by state employees. This offers them a lot more protections than they would have otherwise, and is an important part of guaranteeing a good wage and important benefits.

2.) One of the committees I served on in the Senate last biennium was on Institutions. We talked a great deal about safety at courthouses. I know some in the legislature are interested in possibly saving money by reducing security measures when the court was not in session. I reminded them often that the courthouse staff on the front line—at all levels—need protections to ensure their safety even when court is not in session and just judges and lawyers. Obviously, there are often heated conflicts involved in any legal proceeding, and I do not want to put our front line workers at risk by cutting corners on security.

This is just one way in which we need to think more broadly and deeply about the safety of our workers. There must be clear channels developed and maintained between state employees and the legislature so that we as lawmakers have a good sense of the safety needs of our state workers. Those on the front line know best what protections they require; we must constantly seek their input to develop effective safety plans and protocols.

We also know that sometimes buildings themselves—air quality, etc.—can create an unhealthy environment. We must be vigilant in doing on-site assessments of our workplaces to guarantee that workers are able to do their jobs in healthy workplaces.

We also must have an eye to emotional safety, and not just physical safety. It is critical that all employees regardless of age, gender-identity, race, sexual orientation or ethnicity feel emotionally and physically safe working in Vermont. It was with great sadness, frustration and anger that I read the reports about some workers at VTrans who felt harassed at work. This cannot be tolerated in any form.

It is imperative that our “safety” audits of agencies include emotional safety.

3.) I have been a strong supporter of Dr Dyno 2.0 and worked hard last year to make sure the study got funded to investigate the feasibility of increasing the covered age of children up into their 20s. Working families are hit hard by healthcare costs; it is very appealing to me to have a health care system in place that would take health insurance worries away from young workers who are entering the workforce. Although it will not immediately solve all our health care issues, I do think that it is a possible next positive step towards universal healthcare.

4.) Yes, I will support collective bargaining rights and vote against “right to work” legislation. We must also fully fund the Pay Act and fully fund our pensions.

5.) State workers are the folks who do the work of Vermont day in and day out, year-round, often without acknowledgement or thanks from the general public. I often view the legislators (myself included) as temps. We are a critical piece of the puzzle of state government, but we are on-site just 4 months a year, and there are a lot of details we miss or get wrong. Without state workers, all our initiatives and programs would come to nothing. We must remind each other and the public often that state employees hold this state together.

6.) I am a strong advocate of Results First accountability (also known as Results-based accountability), as it enables us to determine which programs and initiatives are working and which are not. We must fund programs that are successful, meet citizens' needs, and give good value to all our tax payers; we all know that resources are often limited. It will always be my goal to use clear and understandable metrics for evaluating initiatives so that we can spend our money wisely and have the resources we need to retain state employees in their jobs. Our biggest and best resources are the right people on the ground; we need to retain these workers and treat them well.

7.) I am keenly interested in the initiatives to provide Vermonters with several years of tuition free/debt free higher education. I, like so many Vermonters, am concerned with both the cost of higher education and the poor results we've shown in getting Vermont high school graduates to continue their education. We also have a serious debt problem when it comes to students who drop out of college before they have graduated and then are carrying so much debt and do not yet have a degree. Enabling the average Vermonter to attend CCV, our state colleges or Vermont Tech and earn 2 years of credits debt-free would be a terrific boost to the longterm health of our economy.

8.) As a member of the Institutions committee last biennium, I advocated for money for VTech and Castleton University for critical upgrades. Our state college system is a great value for Vermonters and we must commit to these institutions and their programs.

9.) Yes, I do support a livable wage for Vermonters and we should start taking the concrete steps to move us towards \$15 an hour. In conjunction with an increase in the minimum wage, we also really need to tackle our lack of affordable housing in many areas of the state.

10.) I would be honored to have the VSEA endorsement, as I ran for the Senate from Windham County to represent average, working Vermonters like all the members of the VSEA who work so hard for our state. I know unions have taken some real hits across our country in the past few decades, and we know the result: a decimated middle class!

One issue in particular I would like to continue to investigate and tackle is the issue of long term temps hired by the state who work for prolonged periods of time—years even!—with no benefits or retirement funds to show for it. It is simply wrong to treat people this way. It also does not engender faith in the state nor does it create a supportive work environment.

As I stated earlier, I support collective bargaining, fair contracts, universal healthcare, emotionally and physically safe work environments for VSEA employees and fully funding the Pay Act and pensions.

An endorsement and help with GOTV in my county would be much appreciated. Feel free to contact me if you require further information or clarification.