

Questionnaire responses from Senator Ginny Lyons

1. Should the work of state government be performed by state employees?

Yes. Agencies should utilize state employees to implement state laws. There are some instances where state government has compromised this process. For example - the use of private correctional facilities should be suspended. Privatizing state work should be the last resort. The 2017 Budget includes a provision to analyze numbers of executive branch managerial and supervisory positions not providing direct service functions. This and other provisions can help ensure that state employees continue to perform state functions.

When contracts are used, state agencies should include fair compensation and adequate benefits to ensure that non-profit organizations can survive even if they are paid at Medicaid levels. The budget audit of 2015 of a non profit organization (Howard Center) and the contract analysis in H.812 (now law) of 2016 are provisions that I wrote and put into law to insure fairness for contracted workers at community service organizations such as the VNAs, nursing homes, Washington County Mental Health, or the Howard Center.

2. As an elected official how would you improve the overall safety of state employees?

I helped write and pass ACT 109, which provides for workplace violence prevention and crisis response policies in all AHS Departments “for the benefit of employees delivering direct social or mental health services”. Policies are required through

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contract provisions with DAs and similarly contracted organizations. Future legislation should direct all Agencies to have similar written policies. In addition security programs should be developed for specific state employee buildings and worksites. This may include personnel or technologies to protect workers entering or leaving work. Continuous improvement of OSHA and VOSHA standards can also help guide workplace safety. This can be accomplished through the rule making process as well as through legislation. In the past I have worked with the nurses union to support legislation that protects nurses /health care personnel from lifting patients or heavy equipment. Having “paid sick leave” policies in place can protect workers from illness and also allow workers time to help when needed at home. I co-sponsored the Senate bill on paid sick leave.

3. What is your plan to make the health care system more fair and equitable for working Vermonters?

Below is a list of things I have worked on and will continue to work on. We have made huge progress in these areas to reduce cost, increase quality and increase access to health care.

- Continue to work for Universal coverage for all.
- continue health care subsidies based on need.
- ensure that ACT 48 , ACO and All Payer principles are followed in health care reform
- Encourage ACO and All Payer development including necessary waivers.
- Increase Medicaid reimbursement to be at least comparable to Medicare.
- improve access through Dr. Dynasaur expansion and Primary care for all expansion

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- include social services, mental health and substance abuse care in health coverage.
- expand the Blueprint
- ensure that those with quality coverage maintain that coverage and those with lower premium coverage can improve
- increase access to dental care
- improve access to alternative therapies
- increase access to ophthalmological and optometric care.
- increase access to community based services as part of a continuum of care. Perhaps use Oregon model for guidance.
- reduce Rx drug costs.
- eliminate the Cadillac tax.

4. Will you support collective bargaining and vote against “right to Work” legislation in any form?

YES. As an example I supported the resolution for state intervention to resolve the Fair Point strike. Ensuring that workers positions are not reclassified can protect overtime requirements.

5. What do you see as the role of state employees and how will you help them in their role?

State workers are educated /skilled at what they do. They are hired to carry out the mission and activities set forth in statute for their specific areas. As for any employee in an organization I will support workplace safety, sane work requirements, ability to organize and negotiate for better conditions, benefits etc. I listen to workers to understand how we can improve state government through administrative, organizational or other changes. State government is important for the health and welfare of people, the

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environment and the economy. We need to have adequate state employees to carry out necessary work.

6. What mechanisms will you put in place to avoid budget shortfalls?

We can continue to build special funds to meet state obligations for retirement pay, to complete work to clean up waterways, improve Ag Viability, health care, and other state needs. The workers' compensation fund requires Agencies and Departments contribute sufficient funds to meet the needs for all employees. Understanding the implications for employees when a bill is passed into law is critical. Raising fees related to specific needs, has and can continue to help fund state government. Ensuring that revenue adequately meets budget needs is essential.

7. What approach do you take to make higher education more affordable for Vermonters?

The Dual enrollment, flexible pathways law was the result of my work as Vice Chair of Education in the Senate. Continuing to fund the dual enrollment program is critical. Career development discussions begin in middle school and prepare students to become trained workers regardless of their socioeconomic status. Linking students to Individual learning plans allows those with technical skills to enter into higher ed in ways they might not without the programs. This also prevents dropouts. Allowing for two years of college while in HS increases affordability of higher ed. to VTers. Increased access to VSAC funds is a good step in the 2017 budget. Students should pay for higher ed based on income/ ability to pay. As we identify a dedicated revenue source we should provide matched savings for college accounts. Some businesses

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may wish to contribute to such an effort. Allow Vermont residents to eliminate some or all college debt by working for two years in local community service jobs. Limit the interest levels of college loans. Continue and improve loan repayment programs for needed professionals and workers. Continue programs for the evaluation of experiential learning to count for college credit – this can reduce the cost significantly.

8. What would you do to ensure the viability of the state college systems?

Continue the dual enrollment program and perhaps expand it to include affiliations with specific out of state high schools. This would require technology/distance-learning opportunities. Continue to increase support for state colleges from state general fund. Build agreements between employers (including the state) and specific degree programs in state colleges- allow debt reduction with employment in state at those business for a period of time. We might consider linking business tax credit benefits with business participation in state college programs. Complete a program audit of state college administrative services and compare with direct student teaching/research services. Shift monies/resources as appropriate.

9. Do you support a livable wage for Vermonters? If so what do you think the amount should be?

YES. It depends on where in the state you live. The livable wage in my District was indicated to be \$19-20.00/hour. We should work to get to \$15.00/hour. It was a process to move the minimum wage to \$10.00+ for 2018.

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10. Briefly state why the VSEA should endorse you and describe the kind to assistance you be seeking from a VSEA endorsement.

For the past 10 years I have Co-Chaired the Vermont Commission on International Trade and State Sovereignty. We have identified over 6000 good paying jobs that have left our state as a result of Free Trade Agreements. Each year we have worked to educate our Congressional delegation, the USTR, VT citizens about the needs to change the FTA negotiation and other processes. This year I introduced a resolution that began with the AFL-CIO. The resolution addressed how FTAs undermine national and Vermont employment. The Senate unanimously passed that resolution. In the past I have voted for worker rights and supported the retention of state government positions. I have worked to add workers such as in the AG Agency for clean up of ground waters of the state. Government is only as good as the workers who support it. We have a remarkable workforce and hope we can retain and add competent workers. Building programs that educate and develop workers is one aspect of this process. During previous sessions I worked to improve hospital staff patient ratios, pay for nursing home workers, with DOL to provide development funds for pre-K workforce improvement and other specific provisions. . This session, I worked to increase reimbursement for DAs, Choices for Care, VNAs, and primary care providers. Each of these activities takes time. Each improves outcomes for Vermont workers, including VSEA members.

Any financial, political support is welcome – phone banks, fund raising, waving on street corners would each be helpful. I don't have a law degree in labor relations, but I understand many of the issues important to Vermont workers and VSEA. I have

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worked with different unions at different times and look forward to continued work together with VSEA.

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