

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

Yes. Having worked in State government for nineteen years (though I was Exempt), I have tremendous respect for State employees. Often times, our Legislators feel that work can be outsourced to private industry for less money and better service. That has not been my experience. In many cases, the average State worker does not make the same salary as those with comparable jobs in private industry. And, I've found the vast majority of State workers take great pride in their work.

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

I would try to assure that state employees have safe working environments. Too often, the State tries to postpone building improvements due to budget shortfalls. These tend to be extended from year to year with the result being that employees are working with no air conditioning in the summer and not enough heat in the winter. Old buildings that house state offices are often overcrowded and energy inefficient.

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

As a State employee, I have been very happy with the health care offered to me. Regardless, of the provider, my insurance has been comprehensive and affordable. Thank you to the VSEA for your role in ensuring good health and dental care for the State's employees.

I believe everyone has the right to good health care and I believe Vermont has been an example of a state trying very hard to make sure this happens. Unfortunately, health care is expensive and Vermont does not have a large population base. The efforts of the Shumlin administration proved to be unsustainable for the State. I would rather see expansion of programs that we know work such as Dr. Dinosaur and Medicaid on a gradual basis, adding more and more of the uninsured. Also, as a legislator I would support any programs that would reduce the costs of prescription drugs.

4. Will you support collective bargaining and vote against "Right to Work" legislation in any form?

I do support collective bargaining; however, I cannot agree to vote against any legislation without seeing the legislation first.

5. What do you see as the role of State employees and how would you support them in their role?

Vermont's state employees run so many aspects of state government and our daily lives. They plow our roads, they provide human services, keep our environment clean and keep us safe. Most of the State employees I know are dedicated, hard-working people that don't receive nearly the credit they deserve from administrations and legislatures.

It often amazes me that state employees are not given more serious consideration for the large voting group they are. Too often, when past administrations and legislatures have been faced with budget gaps, the first thing they propose are job cuts to state workers. While every organization has some positions that could be combined or removed, in past years, State government has subject to far more cuts than has been prudent. As a legislator, I would not support drastic job cuts. I would support cost of living raises. And, I would treat them as the experts in their fields that they are, when called on by the legislature to testify.

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

I would not support new programs that are funded on one-time monies, as they are not sustainable. I would seriously review the abundant number of studies mandated by legislature every year to first determine their necessity and, second, to see if they could either be conducted by any State entity or at least an in-state company. And, I would listen carefully to the department and agency heads for their recommendations for savings. They are the experts in their areas and are most knowledgeable of where either cuts can be made or economies can be achieved.

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

We have to do a better job of supporting our State colleges and universities. We spend so much on primary and secondary education and not a proportionate amount on higher education. Education is an investment – an investment in our future work force. If we want to bring jobs to our state, we need to have a workforce that is ready for them.

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

If at all possible, I would support allocating more funds to the system. We have some great state colleges that offer a good education at more affordable rates than private institutions. We could also strengthen the job placements for graduates, thereby making the colleges more attractive to would-be students.

9. Do you support a livable wage for Vermonters? If so, what would that amount be?

Yes, I support livable wages for Vermonters. That amount will vary according to county, with the livable wage in Chittenden County being higher than that in a rural area. In a study prepared by the Legislative Joint Fiscal Office in 2015 entitled, *Basic Needs Budget and the Livable Wage*, the 2014 livable wage was set at \$13.00 per hour (average for urban and rural areas). Since they seem to have researched the study quite well, I will go with their recommendation, though I would be open to other well-substantiated opinions.

10. I have worked in State government for nineteen years and I worked for private industry prior. I have seen the commitment to the State and their jobs that the vast majority of Vermont State employees have. I believe that the VSEA has done an admirable job of providing good benefits packages for its members and for all state employees. I was in an exempt position, therefore not a member of the VSEA, and I still benefitted from the Associations negotiations with the various administrations. I am a strong supporter of the State employees and the good work they do. I realize the important role the VSEA plays in making sure state employees are fairly compensated and have decent working environments. There are a few things I would like to see changed in the way the union negotiates on behalf of employees, but for the most part, VSEA does a great job for the people it represents. Your endorsement would be the greatly appreciated.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the VSEA candidate questionnaire.

Sincerely,

Marcia Lawrence Gardner

Candidate for State Representative, Chittenden – 1, Richmond