



WEEK IN ACTION!

Weekly News From Your Union ~ March 27 – March 31, 2017

Your union's weekly newsletter, *Week In Action*, is emailed every Friday afternoon. *Week In Action* is the best way to stay up to date with weekly VSEA news!

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Environmental Testing Prompts Evacuation Of State-Leased Building In St. Johnsbury

VSEA is very concerned after being informed by the State yesterday that AHS employees are being evacuated from a State-leased office building in St. Johnsbury because "the presence of chemicals typically associated with the dry-cleaning industry" was found "under the foundation of a building the Vermont Agency of Human Services leases for offices, located at 67/72 Eastern Ave. Upon learning of the findings, the Secretary of the Administration directed BGS to temporarily relocate employees to alternate work locations until further testing can be done. VSEA members are working off site and are being updated today, via conference call, on future plans.

From a March 28 memo sent to impacted employees who work in the building(s) in question:

Some of the chemicals identified may pose a potential risk to human health. Indoor air quality has not yet been sampled to determine if a risk currently exists.

Air quality testing will be conducted and begin as soon as tomorrow. A forum will be held on Tuesday April 4, which is when the State expects to have preliminary test results back. A time and location in St. Johnsbury will be announced. In the interim, a conference call will be held tomorrow afternoon, for the employees who work in the affected buildings, to communicate available information. Conference call details will be disseminated as soon as finalized.

When leaving the buildings today, employees should take any portable equipment and personal belongings needed in the coming days. Mission critical employees will be notified and relocated by Friday, March 31, and other employees will be notified as soon as alternate locations have been identified.

Employees should check with their supervisors for specific instructions or questions.

WIA understands that the owner of the State-leased building in St. Johnsbury is in the process of trying to sell it, so preliminary environmental testing was conducted, and the results were what triggered the evacuation.

Note: Needless to say, VSEA will be closely monitoring any and all developments around this potential sick-building case, and your union will be sharing whatever is learned with the workers impacted by this new finding. VSEA representatives will be attending the April 4 briefing.

Non-Management Unit Sick Leave Bank Teetering On Bankruptcy! VSEA Members Urged To Contribute

Donations Being Accepted April 1 To June 30

VSEA member Dawn Carrillo staffs the Non-Management Unit Sick Leave Bank, and she is again asking WIA to sound the alarm that the bank is nearly depleted of hours. She is also announcing that NMU members can donate a few hours to your Unit's sick leave bank from **April 1 to June 30, 2017**.

"Just donating an hour of your time can mean the world to a fellow employee," reads a new flyer DHR is circulating. It also informs state employees that they can **donate any amount of annual- or personal-leave time** to the NMU Sick Leave Bank. "Know that you are performing a wonderful service by helping your friends and fellow employees, who, along with their families, are struggling due to serious health issues," the flyer concludes.

[VSEA members interested in donating some much-needed time to the NMU, Corrections and Supervisory Sick Leave Banks can find a donation form here.](#)

"I want to thank every member for considering a donation to your Unit sick leave bank," says VSEA President Dave Bellini. "Even if you only donate one hour to the bank, these one-hour donations add up. It's so worthwhile because your donation is going to help a fellow state employee who is battling a serious illness."

House Budget Overwhelmingly Passes And Now Moves To The Senate

[Numerous media outlets are reporting today](#) about the House of Representative's near unanimous 143-1 vote yesterday to adopt a \$5.8 billion budget. The House budget now moves to the Senate for debate.

Here is VSEA Strategic Analyst Adam Norton's overview of the budget passed by the House and its impact on VSEA members:

Windsor Work Camp — The Southeast Correctional Facility in Windsor will remain in operation through FY18. The Corrections and Institutions Committee identified alternative savings by expanding the use of electronic monitoring, which was adopted by House Appropriations and will allow for the continued operation of the Windsor Work Camp.

Vermont Veterans' Home (VVH) — The VVH avoided the budget axe for another year, however \$259,000 in overtime costs were removed from VVH's budget. The reduction in projected overtime costs in FY18 is an attempt by the Appropriations Committee to reduce the VVH's call-out rate to an erroneous national average provided to them by VVH management. VSEA will attempt to have this language removed in the Senate, or in FY18 budget adjustment.

Department of Libraries (DL) — The DL found itself again under the scrutiny of the House Appropriations Committee. Fortunately, the DL was spared any budgetary reductions after the Committee learned that any cut to state funding will jeopardize federal funds, which are a third of the DL's budget.

Community High School of Vermont (CHSVT)— VSEA's Corrections Educators were successful in their fight to keep the Community High School of Vermont operating. While the CHSVT will continue to function in its current form, the Appropriations Committee accepted the Education Committee's recommendation to level fund the CHSVT, eliminating \$455,000 in vacancy savings from the CHSVT budget.

AHS Structural Savings — The Appropriations Committee adopted a \$1.5 million reduction to the AHS budget. The budget language instructs the AHS Secretary to identify \$1.5 million in savings through restructuring or administrative efficiencies. This is in addition to the \$1 million reduction outlined in the Governor's FY18 budget proposal.

Judiciary Reclassification — The Appropriations Committee calls for full funding of the prospective reclassification of Docket Clerks, Court Room Operators and Court Security. Unfortunately, the committee did not allocate the \$324,000 necessary to fund the retroactive piece of the workers' reclassification puzzle. VSEA is seeking to include the retroactive funds in the Senate budget bill.

Windsor Work Camp—The Southeast Correctional Facility in Windsor Vermont will remain in operation through FY18. The Corrections and Institutions Committee identified alternative savings by expanding the use of electronic monitoring, which was adopted by House Appropriations, and will allow for the continued operation of the Windsor Work Camp.

Update! Thanks to calls and messages to House members this morning from VSEA members, an amendment that would have closed the Windsor Prison was withdrawn before a vote could be conducted. That's in large part due to VSEA member activism. Thanks for the help!

Vermont State Colleges (VSC) — The Appropriations Committee was forced to scrap the State's recommended \$4 million funding increase to the VSC after Legislative Council warned the committee that the funding source (the level funding of K-12 school budgets), was likely unconstitutional. The committee instead opted to raid the Higher Education Trust Fund for \$2 million to provide the VSC some revenue to ensure its continued operation through FY18. In the meantime, the committee will try to determine if the distribution of State higher-education funding between UVM and the VSC is equitable. Additionally, the committee found another \$880,000 in one-time money to fund the merger and

branding of Lyndon and Johnson State Colleges.

Pay Act — Pay Act funding remains intact to pay for members' negotiated contractual raises of 2.25% and cover state employees' step increases in the coming fiscal year. The committee did adopt the State's proposal to cut \$3.5 million by cutting seventeen positions in the AHS and DOC Central Offices.

Hiring State Employees Saves \$ — The committee approved continuing the successful "Position Pilot Program," which allows certain departments and agencies to hire more classified employees and reduce their reliance on temporary workers and mandatory overtime. The committee adopted the State's recommendation to convert \$1.9 million in overtime and temp savings into 29 Correctional Officer positions. This would reduce the need for mandatory overtime and lessen turnover. The committee found \$1 million in net savings by hiring four additional nurses to manage dual Medicaid- and Medicare-eligible caseloads for DVHA. Additionally, the committee booked an additional \$250,000 in net savings by hiring eight additional state employees to manage coordination of care, and reduce fraud in the Medicaid program.

Column In *Valley News* Supports DOC Community High School Funding & Staffing, Not Cutting Or Eliminating Program

With Vermont lawmakers continuing to grapple with a budget deficit, VSEA educators and support staff working for the DOC Community High School of Vermont (CHSVT) program are again being forced to defend their service against proposed cuts, or worse. This year's targeting of the CHSVT by some lawmakers marks the newest assault on this critical service. Other ill-advised moves and decisions by State officials and lawmakers in recent years have forced CHSVT workers having to defend their service against a proposed merger, weather a series of budget and staff reductions and find ways to produce the best possible outcome for Vermont offenders, all while their service is being "consolidated."

The constant need for these frontline workers to have to defend what they know to be a quality public service is not lost on *Valley News* Columnist Jim Kenyon, who penned a piece in the paper this week, titled "[Former Inmates Find a Teaching Moment Testifying in State House](#)." In the column, Kenyon openly questions why lawmakers and State officials always seem so eager to go after a service so important to the rehabilitation of Vermont offenders.

Here are two excerpts from the piece, which VSEA's lobbying team has been sharing with lawmakers:

"[Earle] Rogers and two other former inmates were in Montpelier to talk about Community High School of Vermont. The school operates in the state's seven prisons and at eight probation and parole offices. Classes range from architecture to personal finance. The hope was that hearing from former inmates might persuade some key lawmakers that supporting the school was in the state's best interest — even in a tight budget year. The school's \$3.3 million annual budget, which includes about \$225,000 in federal money, accounts for less than 2 percent of the overall corrections budget."

&

“In recent years, state budget cuts have reduced the school’s staff from 51 to 37 employees. Along with legislators, the Department of Corrections hasn’t made the school much of a priority. DOC officials are so concerned with maintaining order in the state’s prisons that it often forgets — or ignores — the rehabilitative aspect of incarceration. Inmates don’t have a lot of advocates in Montpelier. It’s simpler, although not cheaper, to spend \$62,000 a year to keep a guy behind bars than to invest in educational programs that might not always pay off.”

CHSVT Service Reminder!

The CHSVT workers’ fight has been going on for many years, but some VSEA members might forget what it is exactly these workers do, so WIA is sharing this brief description of the service as a refresher to any member who might want to lobby on behalf of the CHSVT workers.

“The CHSVT is an accredited independent high school by the Vermont State Board of Education, and recognized as an International Habits of Mind Learning Community of Excellence by the Institute for Habits of Mind. CHSVT primarily serves those currently under supervision of the Vermont Departments of Corrections.

Whether working toward a high school diploma or seeking to improve skills, CHSVT is a place that offers students the opportunity to:

- *Obtain reading, writing, and math skills necessary in the 21st Century;*
- *Acquire life and vocational skills;*
- *Experience structured and disciplined study as the norm;*
- *Have a genuine opportunity to complete high school;*
- *Master the essential skills necessary to be a productive citizen, including daily habits of attendance, learning and responsibility; and*
- *Integrate community-based educational services, job opportunities and job training to support the transition of individuals back to Vermont communities.*

Still Time To Sign The VSEA “Respect State Employees” Petition!

VSEA activists and organizers have been circulating a petition for months that calls on the State’s top official to respect and support Vermont state employees by rejecting privatization, protecting the defined benefit pension plan, enhancing on-the-job safety and security and respecting employees’ right to collectively bargain. To date, hundreds of signatures have been collected but more are needed.

VSEA is conducting a big push right now to collect as many frontline worker signatures as possible. If you have yet to sign this important petition, you can do so online at VSEA.org. Thanks in advance for your support.

House Passes Bill To Protect Workers' Social Media Privacy

[VTDigger reports on March 23](#) that the full House voted this week to pass H. 462, a bill to protect workers from having to share their personal social media account information with an employer or potential employer. The legislation enjoys VSEA's strong support, and the union was asked to testify about the bill, prior to its passage.

"I'm very pleased the House passed H.462," the bill's lead sponsor, Rep. Matthew Hill of Wolcott, tells *Digger*. "It provides social media privacy for employees and provides guidance on how to handle a sensitive situation for employers. This bill is a very small, but important, step in bringing Vermont into the 21st century."

Open Enrollment Period Is Soon To Participate In VSEA's Popular Delta Dental Supplemental Plan Benefit

Letters are going in the mail soon to VSEA members, announcing the open enrollment period to participate in your union's very popular Delta Dental Supplemental Plan. The enrollment period is also when members already in the program can amend their number of dependents also using the program, if this number has changed in the past year.

Once received in your mailbox, all enrollment forms will be due back to VSEA by Friday, May 12, 2017.

*Note: If you are already taking advantage of this benefit, and you have no changes this year to your coverage, **you do not need to send back a new form**, as you will be automatically renewed.*

Central Vermont Chapter Members Participating In Upcoming Climate Change Events. Inviting All VSEA Members To Join Them!

Activists belonging to VSEA's Central Vermont Chapter are casting a net to find other Chapter and VSEA members who would like to participate with them in two upcoming climate-change events, including:

- Earth Day "March for Science" – Saturday April 22 – Washington D.C.; and
- People's Climate March – Saturday, April 29 – Montpelier, Vt.

If you would be interested in marching with VSEA members at either of these events, please contact VSEA Central Vermont Chapter member Ned Swanberg for more information. You can email Ned at ned.swanberg@gmail.com. Members of the Chapter will be carrying the Chapter's banner at each event.

VSEA Seeks Union Organizer

VSEA is seeking an experienced Union Organizer.

Areas of Responsibility Include:

- Leadership Development - Identify existing leaders within VSEA and build relationships with those members through the work of building the union; Identify and recruit members to fill leadership roles within the structure of VSEA; Educate members on ways in which they can talk to their colleagues about the union, develop effective strategies to identify issues, use direct action to make workplace improvements, and staff Labor/Management Committees;
- Support VSEA's Broader Organizational Goals and Activities - Facilitate turnout to events, trainings and meetings; Support key legislative, political, and community and workplace actions as outlined by the VSEA Strategic Plan;
- Identify Member Issues & Move a Plan of Action: Meet with members to discuss current issues of importance; Work to develop and execute a clear work plan around the issues;
- Increase Union Membership: Demonstrate success in signing up fee payer and new employees as VSEA members while engaging union activists and leaders in the process of signing up new members; and
- Communication with Members: Be a frequent worksite presence in worksites, holding face-to-face conversations with VSEA leaders, activists and rank-and-file members; Provide the VSEA Communications Department with regular updates on internal and external organizing efforts; and
- Update VSEA bulletin boards in worksites by providing activists and leaders with updated materials as often as possible.

VSEA seeks to interview dynamic candidates with a track record of commitment to the labor movement and preferably two (2) years of experience as a union or political organizer. Any applicant must have reliable transportation as daily in-state travel is expected. Interested and qualified candidates are encouraged to submit their resume and a cover letter detailing their labor or political experience to Rstout@VSEA.org. Exceptional candidates will be scheduled for an interview.

Reminder: VSEA Membership Recruitment Committee Sponsoring 2017 Recruitment Drive. Prizes Being Awarded!

Last fall, VSEA's Membership Recruitment Committee launched a "Membership Engagement and Recruitment Initiative" to grow the union's ranks. The Committee asked members to talk with current agency-fee payers about the benefits of full-fledged membership and why the member should make the switch. If the member decides to upgrade their membership, the recruiting member will have the satisfaction of knowing they helped their union become stronger, but, in addition, the Membership Recruitment Committee will be awarding different levels of prizes to members, based on the number of new VSEA members recruited.

Here are the guidelines to participate and be eligible for a prize:

- Whether submitting your recruited member(s) name(s) on a physical recruitment card or online, **you must include your name as the recruiter;**
- Every member who recruits a new member will have his or her name entered into a drawing for the Grand Prize. The winner's name will be drawn at VSEA's Annual Meeting in September 2017, and the winner must be present to claim the prize;
- Team entries are being accepted. Please register with Membership Recruitment Committee Chair Katelyn Chase by emailing her at kchase@vsea.org.
- Members who recruit a new member, who then agrees to join your union's political awareness committee (VTPAC) will receive an additional chance to win the Grand Prize, and
- The cut-off date for this competition is **August 30, 2017.**

Here are the different prize levels:

75 prizes awarded - \$10 gift card and a VSEA water bottle
 40 prizes awarded - \$25 gift card and a VSEA hat
 15 prizes awarded - \$50 gift card and a VSEA tote bag
 8 prizes awarded - \$100 and a VSEA vest
 1 Grand Prize - \$1200

Note: WIA is periodically reminding members about this effort until its culmination in August 2017.

Bolton Valley Already Offering VSEA Members Discounted 2017-2018 Passes

Bolton Valley (BV) Ski Resort has been a VSEA Advantage Program participant for years, offering state employees discounted season passes. It's a popular item, and while winter 2016 is not even over yet, BV is already offering VSEA members discounted 2017-2018 ski passes.

Important! To purchase an online, discounted BV 2017-2018 pass, you must first receive a special promotional code directly from the VSEA Advantage Program. To get a promo code, contact VSEA's Susan DeVoid by email (sdevoid@vsea.org) or by phone at 802-223-5247. Susan is only available during normal VSEA operating hours.

After receiving your VSEA online promotional code, simply log on to www.boltonvalley.com/industry to purchase your pass(es).

Enjoy the slopes—and the discount!

April 18 Deadline To Submit Bylaw Changes

The deadline to submit proposals for changes to VSEA's Master Bylaws is Tuesday, April 18, 2017. Proposals must be mailed to: Cassandra Edson, Bylaws Committee Chair, c/o VSEA Headquarters, P.O. Box 518, Montpelier, VT 05602.

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 Cassandra by email at cassandraedson@hotmail.com.

VSEA Schedules 2017 "Day At Fenway" Event For August 27

Last year, VSEA scheduled its first-ever "VSEA Day at Fenway" event, and it was a huge success. This year, VSEA will again be sponsoring a trip to Fenway, this time to see the Red Sox battle the Baltimore Orioles in a 1:05 p.m. start on Sunday, August 27. The estimated cost is \$80 per person, which includes a bus ride to and from the park, as well as a ticket to the game.

If you and your family would be interested in joining your union and fellow members at Fenway on August 27, 2017, you should contact VSEA Union Representative Bob South. You can reach Bob by email at bsouth@vsea.org or by phone at 223-5247.

VSEA Organizer's Upcoming Worksite Meetings

VSEA Organizer Tim Lench is personally conducting informational meetings in set workplaces on set days in four locations. He says the purpose of the meetings is to provide members with an opportunity to "join with their colleagues and VSEA staff for updates and discussion on the issues and challenges facing state employees and the impact on your working conditions and the services they provide." He adds that members are welcome to "come share their ideas and hear from co-workers on how to build a stronger union and improve public services."

Snacks and refreshments are provided.

St Johnsbury

AHS Conference Room
DOH
107 Eastern Ave.

April 11
May 9

Brattleboro

Room 148

State Office Building
232 Main Street

May 12
June 9

White River Junction

Room 170
State Office Building
118 Prospect Street

April 18
May 16
June 20

Springfield,

First Floor Conference Room
State Office Building
100 Mineral Street

April 19
May 17
June 21

VSEA Spring 2017 Training Schedule

VSEA Labor Educator Tim Lenocho asked WIA to make members aware that he has made some changes to his previously announced winter 2016 trainings schedule. Some trainings have been cancelled and the date for others has been changed (= date change).*

If you are interested in registering to attend one or more of the remaining trainings, you can do so by [clicking here](#). Please direct your training questions to Tim at tlenoch@vsea.org.

All trainings begin at 9:00 a.m. and end at 4:00 p.m.

Location may change based on worksite location of registered participants. If this happens, registered participants will be notified at least a week ahead of the training. Mileage and lunch may be reimbursed or provided.

TARGETED DEPARTMENT/BARGAINING UNIT TRAININGS

Vermont State Colleges' Stewards

VTC Campus, Randolph Center
Thursday, April 6

Judiciary Stewards

VTrans Training Center, 1716 US Rte. 302, Berlin
Tuesday, April 11

NEW STEWARD TRAININGS

Steward 2: Protecting the Contract and Building the Union

VTrans Training Center, 1716 US Rte. 302, Berlin

Thursday, May 16

[Click here](#) to register for a training(s)!

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 visiting, VSEA.org/subscribe 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.

Quote Of The Week!

"It's been on the chopping block for years. It's very shortsighted. Most people who are locked up, eventually get out. Why not give them the tools they need to lead productive lives?"

Vermont Lt. Governor David Zuckerman, [responding to a Valley News columnist's question](#) about some lawmakers' continued push to close the DOC's Community High School of Vermont program.

VSEA Legislative Updates Available Online

VSEA's Legislative Team has begun to post weekly updates to let members know what's been happening at the State House in Montpelier. To get the latest VSEA updates from under the Golden Dome, visit VSEA.org

VSEA 2017 Scholarship Applications Now Online!

Every year, the VSEA Scholarship & Awards Committee solicits scholarship applications from VSEA members and their spouses, dependents and domestic partners. The 2017 scholarship applications are now available online, and VSEA students who are seeking financial assistance this year in the pursuit of post-secondary educational goals can download one online at VSEA.org

Important! VSEA Moving To Electronic Balloting

When VSEA conducts its next membership vote; all members will be able to vote electronically for the first time in your union's history. **Members can still receive a ballot by U.S. Mail, but you will need to let VSEA know that this is your preference as soon as possible!** Failure to inform VSEA that you would prefer your ballot via the U.S. Mail could result in you not being able to cast a vote on important decisions that impact the VSEA membership at large.

If you want to continue to cast your vote via U.S. Mail, please send an email to vsea@vsea.org or letter to VSEA headquarters, attention "My Voting Preference", 155 State Street, Montpelier, 05602.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this important notice.

What's VSEA Done For Vermont State Employees? See For Yourself

A lot has happened since the VSEA was officially recognized in 1944 as the voice for Vermont's state employee workforce, and VSEA's Communications Department has now compiled many of your union's notable victories and achievements in a new online chronological history of the VSEA.

"Thankfully, VSEA formed a special committee in the mid-eighties to put together a historical synopsis of what had happened within the union from 1944 to then, and it was a great piece for us to build from," explains VSEA Communications Director Doug Gibson. "This up-to-date history will hopefully help educate more VSEA members about the fights and campaigns of past state employees, reminding them how long it actually took for workers to get to where they are today, in terms of wages, benefits and working conditions. We hope it will be a good resource and tool for members."

View VSEA's new online history timeline at VSEA.org

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:

April 6

Training: State Colleges' Stewards
Vermont Technical College Campus
Langevin Building, Room 101 (Main House)
Randolph Center
9:00 a.m.

April 7

NMU Bargaining Team Meeting
VSEA HQ
Montpelier
9:00 a.m.

April 7

Steward Training 3: The Contract & Challenges In The Workplace
VTrans Training Center
1716 U.S. Route 302
Berlin
9:00 a.m.