



## WEEK IN ACTION!

Weekly News From Your Union ~ April 17 – April 21, 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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### **Displaced VSEA St. Johnsbury Members Receive List Of "Frequently Asked Questions" To Reference As State Begins To Examine If Chemical Residues In Building Had Adverse Impact On Employees' Health**

The Department of Human Resources released a list of "Frequently Asked Questions" on April 18 to try to address the health and safety concerns of the employees who were recently displaced from State offices on Eastern Avenue in St. Johnsbury. The FAQ also instructs employees on protocol and next steps.

[Here is the FAQ](#) (You can find this link on VSEA.org)

VSEA hopes this document is useful not only to the current employees who were displaced, but also to the state employees who worked at the building and retired, or who worked there at some point in their career and always had questions or concerns.

### **State Signs Contract To House Displaced St. Johnsbury Workers!**

[The Associated Press reports on April 18](#) that BGS Commissioner Chris Cole has signed a new, five-year lease to house displaced St. Johnsbury workers at the former microData building in that town. More than 80 workers were recently removed from the 67-72 Eastern Avenue Building(s) after environmental testing found elevated levels of three potentially harmful chemicals thought to be the nasty remnants of a dry cleaning business that occupied the space for decades.

VSEA is still working with displaced members and the State to determine next steps, now that the new housing issue seems to be resolved. Primarily, this means making sure employees' health concerns are being adequately addressed by the State and that their questions are being answered in a timely manner. VSEA has also heard from members who at some point in their career worked at the now abandoned building. They too have questions and are looking for answers.

## **VSEA Judiciary Members Go To State House To Lobby Legislators To Fund Their Retro Pay**

VSEA Judiciary members were in Montpelier on April 18 to lobby legislators to include full funding for their negotiated wage increases in any budget passed. This means enough money to ensure the workers also receive retroactive pay back to December 15, 2016, when they ratified their new contract. The vote to ratify included an agreement from management to conduct an employee wage review, which was completed and found in favor of raises for the Judiciary workers.

VSEA's Judiciary members have argued for years that they were not properly classified, and this fact was confirmed by the neutral, third-party's wage-review findings. Now they say the onus is on the Vermont Legislature to fully fund their negotiated pay increases. It's estimated that \$300,000+ is required to fully fund the raises.

VSEA's Legislative team is optimistic right now that full funding for the Judiciary workers will be included in whatever budget is passed, but VSEA is promising to remain on guard until that happens.

## **Vermont Setting Up To Go Backwards On Private Prisons?**

[VTDigger reports on April 20](#) that the State may soon sign a contract with an unnamed Pennsylvania prison, and the agreement will require Vermont to fill a 250-bed quota for three years. This means that instead of working to bring Vermont inmates back in state, the State may instead end up shipping more out of state to meet its contractual yearly quota.

Senator Dick Sears (D-Bennington) says in the article that DOC Commissioner Lisa Menard has "assured" him and Senate Appropriations Chair Jane Kitchel (D-Caledonia) that Vermont won't be housing inmates out of state if in-state beds are available.

This said, it does still beg the question: "If Vermont is held to a contractual obligation to furnish this prison with 250 inmates, how do State officials and lawmakers fulfill this quota if enough empty beds exist here in Vermont that the numbers don't add up?"

*Note: VSEA's DOC Unit and Board of Trustees have repeatedly voiced the union's opposition to the State's use of private, for-profit, out-of-state prisons, arguing against sending taxpayer money to out of state, for-profit prison operators who simply do not provide the same level of rehabilitation that inmates incarcerated here in Vermont receive.*

## **VSEA State Colleges' Chair Pens Letter To Editor About The Need To Adequately Fund The System**

Note: VSEA State Colleges' Unit Chair Sandy Noyes asked *WIA* to share this letter to the editor she sent this week to her local newspaper. She is also urging VSEA members from other units to support the VSC workers' campaign for the legislature to adequately fund the colleges.

*"My name is Sandy Noyes. I have worked at Johnson State College since 1993. I am the unit chair for the represented staff of the Vermont State Colleges, and I am asking you to help me spread the word.*

*PLEASE CALL the Vermont Sergeant at Arms, 802-828-2228, and leave a message for your representative that you **support fully funding the Vermont State Colleges.***

*We need to make sure they know the importance of funding the Vermont State Colleges. All across Vermont you will find someone who was a staff, student, and/or faculty member at a Vermont State College. These people and their families help keep the economy moving. They eat at the local restaurants, shop at the stores and gas stations, plus pay rent to a landlord and/or a mortgage to our local banks. In turn, those businesses pay taxes into the state coffers, which helps pay for the state services such as the Veterans' Home, food for our children, assistance for the elderly, the list goes on. Local businesses count on this support to help them stay open. We all need to stick together to tell the State of Vermont – WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT.*

*If the VSC doesn't start getting more support from the state, our high school graduates will go to other states to finish their education because they will graduate with less debt. This move will take more money out of the State of Vermont. The Vermont State Colleges have so much to offer so we are asking for everyone's help whether you are a business owner, family member, or John Q. Public. The state needs to hear more voices so please call the Sergeant at Arms and tell your representative **'I support fully funding the Vermont State Colleges!'***

*Please demonstrate your support for Vermont's State Colleges by working with us to ensure any budget passed includes full funding for the Colleges."*

## **Commentary Pushes Back Against Economist's Ongoing Rant About State Employee & Teacher Pensions Dragging Vermont's Economy Down**

[A commentary in the April 16 Free Press by Millard Cox](#) calls the paper's go-to Economist Art Wolff out for always blaming state employee and teacher pension plans for dragging down Vermont's economy. He concludes:

"Labor unions in the private and public sectors have done more to increase the economic power of working people than any other historic factor, and the current levels of wealth inequality in America are directly related to the demise of unions over the past 60 years. The death of unions in America has been engineered by corporations and the wealthy who have influenced elections and lobbied for anti-union legislation. Unionized American jobs have been moved to countries where impoverished, non-unionized workers can be exploited.

Art Woolf is an economics professor who teaches at UVM, which has a unionized faculty. My experience as a public school educator and union partisan is that those faculty members who do not agree with the concept and purpose of unions nevertheless do not refuse to accept the enhanced pay and benefits that are won by the union they do not believe in."

## **Waterbury Chapter Meeting Is April 26!**

VSEA's Waterbury Chapter is meeting Wednesday, April 26, beginning at noon in the State Office Complex's Cherry C (Room A202) in Waterbury. Lunch is being provided!

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Chapter Clerk Liza Nesbitt by email at [lizanesbitt@hotmail.com](mailto:lizanesbitt@hotmail.com).

## **VSEA 2017 Scholarship Application Deadline Is May 8!**

Time is running out to apply for a 2017 VSEA scholarship award. The deadline to apply is Monday, May 8. VSEA members and their spouses, dependents and domestic partners are eligible.

VSEA Scholarship & Awards Committee 2017 [scholarship applications are now available for download online](#).

## **If Searching For Child Care, Don't Forget This Important Resource For State Employees**

Longtime VSEA member, now retiree, Dave Clark has served on VSEA's Child and Elder Care Committee for many years, and he recently asked *WIA* to remind state employees about an important child-care resource that is currently available to them.

"The Committee has noticed a recent decline in employees' usage of the valuable child-care resources available to them, so we asked *WIA* to help us remind VSEA members about what is available," explains Clark.

VSEA members can click [here](#) to learn more about the Committee's "Child-Care Referral Service" and other child-care resources for state employees, including possible child-care reimbursement to qualifying employees.

## **Now Is Time To Enroll In VSEA's Popular Delta Dental Supplemental Plan Benefit**

Letters should have arrived by now in the mailboxes of 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.

All enrollment forms are due back to VSEA by Friday, May 12, 2017.

[VSEA members can also find information and an enrollment form here.](#)

*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 4/29 Climate March In Montpelier. Inviting All VSEA Members To Join Them!**

Activists belonging to VSEA's Central Vermont Chapter are inviting other Chapter and VSEA members to participate with them in the "People's Climate March" on Saturday, April 29, in Montpelier.

If you would be interested in marching with VSEA members at this event, please contact VSEA Central Vermont Chapter member Ned Swanberg for more information. You can email Ned at [ned.swanberg@gmail.com](mailto:ned.swanberg@gmail.com). Members of the Chapter will be carrying the Chapter's banner at the event.

## **2017 Corporate Cup Seeks Volunteers**

The 2017 Corporate Cup 5K Race is being held Thursday, May 11, at the State House in Montpelier, beginning at 6 p.m. Once again, race planners are casting a net for volunteers, and VSEA is urging members and retirees who are able to sign up to help—much as you have in years past!

Volunteer opportunities include registering races, distributing t-shirts, manning the food tents and mid-point water stop, helping at the start and finish lines, assisting the timing company with posting race results and two individuals to help on the cone truck.

To volunteer, please contact Volunteer Coordinator Cindy Hier by email at [chier@zclpc.com](mailto:chier@zclpc.com). Please let Cindy know your task preference and your anticipated arrival time.

Remember: volunteers can walk or run, too. Invite friends, family, neighbors, and co-workers to volunteer with you. Receive a free t-shirt!

## VSEA Schedules 2017 "Steward Summit" Series

In an effort to better educate frontline worksite Stewards about their role in VSEA, as well as provide them with enhancements to their existing skill set, VSEA's Field Department is hosting a series of "Steward Summits" across Vermont throughout 2017.

Stewards will also learn the latest developments relating to contract enforcement and receive an overview of the budget, safety and health and other challenges that lie ahead for state employees. Stewards who attend will be asked to immediately help out by taking some of what they learn back to the worksite to educate their colleagues.

Four, six-hour trainings have been scheduled, and every current VSEA Steward is required to attend one session.

The Steward Summits (all 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.) are:

May 19 – Best Western, 45 Blush Hill Road, Waterbury

August 18 – Best Western, 45 Blush Hill Road, Waterbury

October 20 – Hotel Coolidge, 39 South Main St., White River Junction

November 3 – Holiday Inn, 476 Holiday Drive, Rutland

[Click Here To Register For Steward Summit](#)

## 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."

Forms 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.*

## **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](mailto: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](mailto: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](http://www.boltonvalley.com/industry) to purchase your pass(es).

Enjoy the slopes—and the discount!

## **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](mailto: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.

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

May 16  
June 20

## **Springfield,**

First Floor Conference Room  
State Office Building  
100 Mineral Street

May 17  
June 21

## **Lamoille (Morrisville)**

AHS Conference Room  
State Office Building  
63 Professional Dr.

May 18  
June 15

## **VSEA Spring 2017 Training Schedule**

*The spring 2017 training schedule is winding down, but one session remains.*

*If you are interested in registering to attend this training, you can do so by [clicking here](#). Please direct your training questions to Tim at [tlenoch@vsea.org](mailto:tlenoch@vsea.org).*

*The training begins at 9:00 a.m. and ends 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.*

## **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)!

## **Workers Worldwide Observe “Workers’ Memorial Day” On 4/28**

On April 28, workers across the globe will observe “Workers’ Memorial Day”; a day to pause to remember those who have been injured or killed on the job and renew the fight for strong worker safety and health protections.

Four decades ago, Congress passed the Occupational Safety and Health Act, promising every worker the right to a safe job. Since then, unions and our allies have fought hard to make that promise a reality in Vermont and across the country—winning protections that have made jobs safer, saved hundreds of thousands of lives and prevented millions of workplace injuries and illnesses.

From a national AFL-CIO flyer about Workers’ Memorial Day:

*“On April 28, unions nationwide will observe Workers Memorial Day to remember those who have suffered and died on the job and to renew the fight for safe workplaces. This year, we will come together to call for good jobs in this country that are safe and healthy. We will seek stronger safeguards to prevent injuries and save lives. We will stand for the right of all workers to raise job safety concerns without fear of retaliation, and for the freedom to form unions and speak out and bargain for respect and a better future. Please join us and make your voice heard.*”

[AFL-CIO 2017 Workers’ Memorial Day Poster](#)

[AFL-CIO 2017 Workers’ Memorial Day Fact Sheet](#)

## **More Proof That Attacks On Public-Sector Workers Primarily Benefit The Wealthy**

The Economic Policy Institute (EPI) released the findings this week of a recent study it conducted to determine who benefits from cuts to public employees and the services they provide. The EPI used Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker's cuts to services and jobs to find out where the promised tax cuts that resulted from Walker's cuts went. The answer is the wealthiest Wisconsiners.

Read more here: <http://bit.ly/2pGpLaF>

## **Nebraska Corrections’ Union Leader Blames OT For Violence**

[The York News Times reports this morning](#) about testimony recently offered to a Nebraska Senate Committee that is investigating the reasons behind a spike in violence at the Tecumseh State Correctional Institution. The director of the Nebraska Association of Public Employees, Mike Marvin, provided lawmakers with details about the impact of the increased violence is having on the frontline workers, and an overview of the many challenges they face daily. He talked about chronic understaffing and explained how even if the facility was fully staffed, the workers are “often exhausted because of mandatory overtime.”

“Things happen, people get tired and the inmates get stressed,” Marvin said.

The department has “got to figure out a way to get staffing levels up to where they need to be,” he added. “I think that’ll go a long way toward addressing the violence there.”

## **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](http://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!**

*“The writing on the wall here is that we send more people out of state and we close an in-state prison.”*

Vermonters for Criminal Justice Reform’s Suzy Wizowaty, commenting to VTDigger about the State’s exploring signing a contract that would mandate the DOC keep a minimum 250 Vermont inmates in a yet-to-be-identified Pennsylvania prison for three years straight.

Line from a message being sent this week by VSEA AOT members to the State’s top official, imploring him not privatize guardrail work in Vermont.

## **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](http://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](mailto: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](http://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 26**

Waterbury Chapter Meeting  
Room A202  
WSOC Cherry C  
Waterbury

### **April 27**

Retirees' Chapter Meeting  
VSEA HQ  
Montpelier  
9:00 a.m.

### **April 28**

OCS Labor-Management Committee Meeting  
VSEA HQ  
Montpelier  
9:00 a.m.

### **April 28**

Workers' Memorial Day  
Worldwide

### **April 29**

People's Climate Rally  
State House  
Montpelier  
1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.