



WEEK IN ACTION!

December 4 – December 8, 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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Unless Congress Acts Soon, Vermont Could Lose Federal CHIP Funding In January 2018! Would Create Huge Budget Hole.

Vermont and 49 other states are waiting nervously for any word from Washington D.C. about continued funding of the federal Children's Health Insurance Program, or CHIP. Current funding is exhausted and there is currently no fix or stopgap measure on the table. Failure to continue funding will create a new budget nightmare for many states, including Vermont.

Minnesota, Oregon and Connecticut officials are already preparing worst-case-scenario letters to parents of kids covered under CHIP, but ways to address the potential crisis vary greatly, as reported a recent story about CHIP funding from the [Tribune News Service](#):

"Other states are expected to run out of CHIP funding in the next months, although not all will follow the path taken by Minnesota and Oregon, of investing state resources to make up for the loss of federal funds. By state law, some of them are required to shut down their CHIP programs if federal funding disappears. Colorado and Virginia have announced that they plan to send letters to the families of CHIP beneficiaries in the next weeks to alert them to the end of the program Jan. 31."

Vermont stands to lose tens of millions and will do so earlier than any other New England state (January 18, 2018).

[Mother Jones CHIP-Funding Story](#)

Note: Bad news, because as VSEA members know, anything that adds to Vermont's already estimated \$45 million deficit will almost certainly increase officials' and lawmakers' calls to cut services or jobs again. Not to mention, it's a terrible development for children and parents who depend on CHIP.

VSEA Elects New Treasurer!

VSEA Treasurer Sheila Manchester Coniff's retirement in October 2017 left an opening that the VSEA membership has now elected Jacklyn Hickerson to fill. Hickerson is a Tax Field Auditor, working in the Tax Department's Burlington office.

"I would like to say thank you for entrusting me to serve as your treasurer," Hickerson wrote in a statement to *WIA*. "It is my hope to not only meet but also

exceed your needs and expectations. My immediate goal is to provide accountability and transparency in all financial matters to ensure an informed membership. Ultimately, my long-term goal is to strengthen our union's financial health by nurturing growth and fortification against uncertainties. I look forward to serving as your treasurer."

Members of VSEA's Elections, Rules and Nominating Committee tallied and certified the results last Friday, after *WIA* had published.

Congratulations Jacklyn and welcome aboard!

Photo: Jacklyn is sworn into office at the VSEA Board of Trustees' December 6 meeting by past VSEA President, now Retiree Chapter President, Bob Hooper.

Today Is The Deadline To RSVP For December 16 VSEA Children's Holiday Gathering!

Members of VSEA's Special Events Committee invited VSEA members and their children last week to attend a special VSEA Holiday Gathering on Saturday, December 16, from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. at VSEA Headquarters in Montpelier.

Children can visit with Santa, and everyone can enjoy some refreshments!

Interested members **must RSVP on VSEA.org by 4:30 p.m., today, December 8, 2017**. Doing so helps ensure the Committee can plan accordingly.

Vermont's Probation and Parole Reparative Program Needs (And Deserves) Your Vote. Program Is One Of Five National Finalists!

DOC Community Corrections Specialist II Herb Sinkinson and his colleagues who administer the Vermont Probation and Parole (P&P) Department's statewide "Reparative Program" were recently notified that their "reparative and restorative justice" program is one of five finalists in a national contest to recognize "innovators in community supervision who are championing innovative programs and empowering clients," as well as victims and community members.

The contest is sponsored by cFive Solutions; a company that provides software solutions for Community Supervision and Probation agencies. Sinkinson and the Reparative Program are up against programs located in Ohio, Nevada and two in Kansas.

Let's help these deserving VSEA members make sure Vermont wins!

[Click here](#) and cast your vote today for Herb Sinkinson, Burlington Probation and Parole and the Vermont Reparative Program!

Deadline to vote in the "Being The Change" contest is Friday, February 15.

Vermont Public Assets Institute Warns Lawmakers (Again) That Without Additional Revenue, Cuts Will Continue To Be Sole Option

Vermont's Public Assets Institute (PAI) issued a statement on December 7, warning the State and lawmakers that unless additional revenue is found, cuts to Vermont's quality public services will continue to be the state's sole option to address yet another multi-million-dollar budget deficit. PAI reminds that this year is more complicated due to the U.S. Congress' coming federal budget cuts.

[From the PAI statement:](#)

"All this means that once again, as they've done for the last 10 years, the administration and the Legislature will head into a new budget season having to generate additional revenue or makes cuts throughout much of state government.

In the past, they have favored cuts rather than addressing the structural problems with Vermont's revenue system. But federal tax 'reform' may force them to act. Montpelier might have to decide it's time to recoup some of Washington's tax giveaways."

Note: For the sake of Vermonters and the public services they depend on, let's hope this is the year lawmakers and the State begin to discuss tax equity and how to generate some new revenue. Remember, some services still haven't rebounded from the last half-dozen "position and service reduction exercises," as they are often referred to in Montpelier.

2018 VSEA Bus Trip To Foxwoods Casino Announced!

The VSEA Membership Recruitment Committee has hosted some very successful trips since launching the member-engagement effort more than a year ago, including ones to NASCAR races, Red Sox games and even a trip to see Disney on Ice. But the most popular trip to date has been to the Foxwoods Casino in Connecticut, and the Committee is pleased to announce a new casino trip in 2018 with a two-night stay.

Dates:

March 23 to 25, 2018

Bus Cost:

\$70 per person

Bus will depart from Waterbury at 12:00 p.m. and White River Junction at 1:00 p.m.

Lodging (Two Nights/Two Trees Inn):

\$248/single occupancy

\$138 per person/double occupancy

\$122 per person/triple occupancy

Included Bonuses:

Baggage handling;

(2) \$10 food credit or full Festival Buffet;
\$5 food credit or full Breakfast Buffet;
\$20 slot play;
20% discount at any Foxwoods gift shop with a purchase of \$25 up to \$1,000; and
A Foxwoods souvenir

Questions?

Please contact VSEA Union Rep Bob South (bsouth@vsea.org) or Administrative Assistant Sue DeVoid (sdevoid@vsea.org). Each can be reached by phone at **802-223-5247**.

Important Information!

*Payment must be received within one week of registering or you will lose your spot. Cash, check and **credit card** payments accepted. To pay, please contact VSEA Union Representative Bob South by email (bsouth@vsea.org) or phone 802-223-5247. Thank You!*

Important Reminder! Support Your VSEA Bargaining Teams By Wearing Green On December 15.

Note: Pictured here is the VSEA Board of Trustees, who met this week and posed for a photo to remind all members to support your Bargaining Teams next Friday by wearing green and sending messages.

Two years ago, the State forced VSEA members belonging to our union's Non-Management, Corrections and Supervisory Units--at great taxpayer expense, mind you--to go all the way to the Vermont Labor Relations Board (VLRB) for a final contract determination, which was thankfully in the employees' favor. Now, two years later, the same three Units are facing a similar, stubborn negotiating game plan by the State, and **it's time now for every VSEA member to help your Bargaining Teams!**

Your Unit Teams are headed to fact-finding on Friday, December 15; the final step before once again heading to the VLRB. **On Friday, December 15, you can support your Teams in worksites across Vermont by wearing something green.** It's that simple. VSEA would also love it if you would shoot a few group photos of VSEA members wearing green and send them to headquarters. Photos of VSEA members holding messages for the State and its negotiators are also very welcome.

Below are some sample messages:

(Click the links to view/download a PDF sign to print)

[I Support My VSEA Bargaining Team](#)

[We Deserve Fair Wage Increases!](#)

[Fair Contract Now!](#)

[Hands Off Our OT!](#)

[Hands Off Our Health Plans!](#)

Or make your own! Sign themes should play off this message:

State employees are skilled, trained, and knowledgeable professionals that must be treated in a respectful manner with fair compensation and contract improvements that reflect such dedicated service to Vermonters.

[Send Your Photos To VSEA Easily Here](#)

Or email your photos to vsea@vsea.org

Note: Always remember that you can contact a member of your Unit Bargaining Team at any time with questions about the current negotiations. [Find Unit Bargaining Team Contact Information Here](#)

Bennington & Rutland Members: Electronic Ballot Coming On December 15 To Vote In District 5 VSEA Trustee Election

All eligible VSEA members (except those who request a paper ballot) **will receive an email on December 15** from vote@simplyvoting.com containing your electronic ballot to vote in the VSEA District 5 Trustees' election. "Eligible" member refers to whether or not the member belongs to one of the Units where a seat is being contested or belongs to a Chapter in a region where a vote is being conducted (i.e. District 5 seat represents Bennington and Rutland region, so VSEA members belonging to the Bennington and Rutland Chapters should receive a ballot).

Very important! Your electronic ballot is being sent to both the home and work email address that VSEA currently has on file for you. **If you do not receive an email from vote@simplyvoting.com on December 15, please look in your "Other" or "Spam" folders before contacting headquarters to request that your ballot be reissued.**

Reminder: VSEA is sending ballots to members' home or work email address, provided the union has your correct home and work email address. This is a big reason why *WIA* is constantly soliciting members to contact VSEA with your updated email address. [You can update your contact information here anytime.](#)

Chittenden Chapter Next Meets On December 13

Note: WIA apologizes for publishing the wrong date last week for this meeting.

VSEA's Central Vermont Chapter will next meet on Wednesday, December 13, beginning at 5:30 p.m. at Halvorsons Upstreet Café, 16 Church Street in Burlington. Appetizers will be served.

If you have any questions in advance, please feel free to contact Chittenden Chapter President John Gauthier via email: john.gauthier@vermont.gov.

Central Vermont Chapter Next Meets On December 13

VSEA's Central Vermont Chapter will next meet on Wednesday, December 13, beginning at 12:00 p.m. in the National Life complex's Winooski Room in Montpelier. Food and beverages are being provided.

If you have any questions in advance, please feel free to contact Central Vermont Chapter President Cassandra Edson via email: cassandraedson@hotmail.com.

Retirees' Chapter Next Meets On December 15

VSEA's Retirees' Chapter next meets on Friday, December 15, beginning at 9:30 a.m. at VSEA Headquarters, located at 155 State Street in Montpelier.

Brattleboro Chapter Hosting Holiday Luncheon On December 15

VSEA's Brattleboro Chapter is hosting a holiday luncheon for Chapter members on Friday, December 15, from 12:15 p.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the State Office Building, located at 232 Main Street. The event coincides with "Wear Green" day for VSEA members working in state offices across Vermont, and Brattleboro Chapter President Robin Rieske is urging members to wear green to the holiday luncheon, where "holiday Chinese food" is on the menu.

Robin is asking members to please RSVP in advance for the luncheon. You can email her at robin.rieske@vsea.org.

Lawmakers' Survey Looks For Vermonters' Input On State Budget

With Vermont lawmakers returning to the State House in January, having to address yet another new multi-million-dollar budget deficit, a survey has posted online where Vermonters can share their thoughts with lawmakers about Vermont's current budgeting process, the services important to you and how Vermont taxpayer dollars should be allocated.

VSEA is urging every state employee to log on and take this important survey because no voices are more important in this upcoming budget debate than those of the frontline state workers who provide many of the services that are sure to be scrutinized when push comes to shove at the State House.

[Take Budget Survey Here!](#)

Note: One lawmaker is already apologizing to his constituents for the survey's failure to include services for aging Vermonters.

Dozen Seats Still Remain For VSEA Boston Bruins Bus Trip!

*VSEA's Membership Recruitment Committee had a great response to this week's email solicitation for an upcoming Bruins' bus trip, and they want VSEA members to know that **just 10 tickets now remain** for:*

Boston Bruins vs. Toronto Maple Leafs
Saturday, February 3, 2018
7:00 p.m.
TD Garden ([Section: Balcony 321](#))
Boston

Based on the popularity of the first few member bus trips sponsored by VSEA, your union's Membership Recruitment Committee (a small group of rank-and-file state employees who coordinate and host VSEA's outings) recently polled members to find out what kinds of bus trips members want the Committee to pursue in the future. Coming up number one was a trip to Boston for a Bruins game, so the Committee has scheduled this trip.

\$170 Per Person - Includes a bus ride to and from the park, as well as a ticket to the game.

To reserve a seat(s) on the bus, contact VSEA Union Representative Bob South. You can reach Bob by email at bsouth@vsea.org or by phone at 223-5247.

Important! VSEA will be taking the names down of those interested, as members contact VSEA, but you will not be officially on the bus until full payment is received at headquarters. Please make checks payable to VSEA.

Time Running Out To Donate Some Time To The Non-Management Unit's Sick Leave Bank!

Donations Being Accepted To December 31

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 really needs your donated hours. NMU members can donate a few hours to your Unit's sick leave bank **until December 31, 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."

Vermont Lawmakers Must Begin Filing Financial Disclosure Reports In 2018

Today, Vermont is one of only three states that does not require its elected lawmakers to file financial disclosure reports, but according to [a story today on Governing.com](#) that will change in 2018.

From the story:

“Forty-seven states now require lawmakers to file some type of financial disclosure that lists their occupation, income or business associations — information that indicates if a legislator might benefit personally from supporting or opposing legislation.

Vermont will begin mandating disclosure reports next year. And in Idaho, a group of lawmakers recently agreed that elected officials should disclose financial information and forwarded a proposal to the full Legislature for consideration in 2018.”

Vermont Falls To #19 In Latest Survey Of Best- & Worst-Run States

The website *24 / 7 Wall Street* recently posted an article, titled “[The Best- and Worst-Run States In America: A Survey of All 50,](#)” and here is how Vermont fared:

19. Vermont

- 2016 Unemployment: 3.3% (7th lowest)
- Pension funded ratio: 67.8% (20th lowest)
- Credit rating and outlook: AAA / Stable
- Poverty: 11.9% (19th lowest)

Vermont ranked as the best-run state in New England last year and the 14th best run in the country. This year, it ranks third in New England and 19th overall. Vermont’s drop in ranking this year may be due to its recent population decline, even as other states in the region have added residents.

A fiscally responsible state, Vermont has earned the top credit rating from Moody’s with a stable outlook. While obtaining health insurance is often ultimately the responsibility of the individual, Vermont has taken steps to ensure its citizens have access to medical care. The state is one of 32 to have expanded Medicaid, and Vermont allocates 5.3% of its budget to health care spending, considerably more than the 3.4% average across all states. While the availability of jobs can be affected by forces outside the government’s control, the government can enact policies that attract companies and create jobs. A low unemployment rate can be indicative of sound policies. In Vermont, only 3.3% of the labor force was out of work in 2016, well below the comparable U.S. unemployment rate of 4.9%

States Begin To Worry About Proposed Cuts To Federal SNAP Food Assistance Program

According to several reports this week, [including this article from Mother Jones](#), states are beginning to openly worry about the federal government’s proposed

cuts to the nation's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as the Food Stamp Program.

In a press release issued on December 5, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which oversees the SNAP benefit, "promises, 'increased cooperation with states' to 'promote self-sufficiency, integrity in the program, and better customer service.' The release repeatedly uses the phrase "flexibilities" to describe the coming changes, which it adds will be specified in coming weeks."

In early May, the new Administration released a budget proposal that included a 25% spending cut for this worthwhile and essential program.

Union Rep Holding Vet's Home Meeting

VSEA Union Representative Rachael Fields has scheduled a meeting to talk with Vet's Home employees about their issues and concerns.

If you work at the Vet's Home, please mark the date and time down to stop by and talk with Rachael:

December 27 (Crispe Room)

Available Times: 6:30 a.m., 1:00 p.m., 2:30 p.m., 3:30 p.m. and 4:30 p.m.

Quote Of The Week!

"A [Pew Research Center poll](#) conducted earlier this year found 48 percent of Americans prefer a bigger government providing more services. That exceeded those preferring a smaller government with fewer services (45 percent) for the first time since late 2008."

From an article posted this week to [Governing.com](#), titled "[A Downsized Public Workforce May be a Permanent Consequence of the Recession](#)."

Upcoming Meetings/Events/Holidays:

December 12

Council Meeting
Old Labor Hall
46 Granite Street
Barre
9:00 a.m.

December 13

Central Vermont Chapter Meeting
National Life
Winooski Room
Montpelier
12:00 p.m.

December 13

Chittenden Chapter Meeting
Halvorson's Restaurant
16 Church Street
Burlington
5:30 p.m.

December 14

ESD Worksite Meeting w/Organizer
20 Federal Street
St. Albans
12:00 p.m.

December 15

VSEA / State Fact Finding Begins
WEAR GREEN!

December 15

Electronic Ballots Arrive In D.5 Members' Inboxes

December 15

Retirees' Chapter Meeting
VSEA HQ
155 State Street
Montpelier
9:30 a.m.

December 15

Brattleboro Chapter Holiday Luncheon
State Office Building
232 Main Street
Brattleboro
12:15 p.m.

December 15

Deadline To [Vote For Burlington P&P Office](#)