



Week In Action Newsletter

May 15, 2020

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State Announces Procurement Of Two Cloth Masks For Every State Worker

The Department of Human Resources sent an email this week, announcing that “the State has worked with local vendors as well as Federal Health & Human Services to procure enough re-usable cloth face masks to **supply all State of Vermont employees with two masks each.**” DHR explains that the mask distribution is “in preparation for a gradual Return to the Workplace, to be implemented when deemed appropriate.”

“This distribution does not mean that you are returning to the workplace soon,” the email reads. “A separate plan is being developed to return employees to their work places, but no faster than is deemed safe for employees and customers, in keeping with CDC and VDH guidelines. These face coverings are intended for your personal use when you return to work.

How To Get Your Masks

DHR's email says it has made arrangements to distribute masks to AOT employees at garages in each geographic region of the State. However, any state employee who works or lives in the county of the AOT garage where distributioj is happening is eligible to pick up your two cloth face coverings on that day at the AOT garage. Local AOT personnel will set up a drive-through in the parking lot so employees can remain in their car and receive

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their cloth face coverings. Face covering distribution will take place from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

AOT Garage Mask Distribution Sites & Dates Available on VSEA.org

DHR Note: There is an expectation that not all employees will need the cloth face coverings, as some may already have their own appropriate face coverings. There is an expectation that employees will go to a site closer to their home and not to the site in the county where they work. Please call or email Eric Forand (eric.forand@vermont.gov) at 802-585-0633 with questions.

Chittenden Regional Employee Tests Positive For COVID, Prompting Testing Of All Workers & Inmates There

AHS Secretary Announces Testing To Occur At Additional Facilities

WCAX broke a story Wednesday morning about an employee at the Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility recently testing positive for COVID-19, prompting the State to order testing of all the staff and inmates at the facility. Seven Days reports Wednesday afternoon that the facility's remaining 47 staff, as well as 74 inmates, were tested on Thursday.

As noted in a *Seven Days* story, this makes the third Vermont prison where employees have tested positive for COVID-19, including an employee at Newport's Northern State Correctional Facility, who tested positive in March, and 18 staffers at Northwest State Correctional Facility in Swanton, according to the department's coronavirus tracker. In addition, at Northwest State, 45 inmates have tested positive.

At the State's regularly scheduled COVID-19 press briefing on Wednesday, AHS Secretary Mike Smith praised DOC's response to the outbreak at Northwest State, saying, "What Corrections did in St. Albans is truly amazing. They had a full-fledged outbreak in their

facility up in St. Albans and they stopped it."

Smith said that testing will be conducted next at the St. Johnsbury facility.

VSC Board Chair Cautiously Optimistic About System's Viability--In The Short Term Anyway

VTDigger reports this week on a Monday meeting of the Vermont State Colleges' Board of Trustees, where "former VSC general counsel Sophie Zdatny--who took over for [Chancellor Jeb] Spaulding on an interim basis--informed trustees that a meeting late last week with legislative leaders to discuss funding had gone well.

'I'm cautiously optimistic that we will be getting assistance from the state to help us weather the immediate storm that we're confronting,' she told the system's board of trustees Monday in a meeting held via web conference."

Note: While this is certainly a positive development, VSEA is urging members, retirees and other VSC supporters to continue pressing local lawmakers and the State for bridge funding.

Campaign To Save Vermont's State Colleges Continues!

Keep The Heat On!

VSEA, the AFT and other unions are continuing to urge members and retirees to participate in the next step in a collective campaign to save Vermont's state colleges, which is to call and email your lawmakers and the Governor with this message:

"Please provide bridge funding to the Vermont State Colleges to keep them all open and operating."



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Find State Lawmakers' Contact information and the Governor's Office Contact information on VSEA.org

Equally important, after you send the message, please reach out to anyone you might know who is fighting along with VSEA to prevent these closures to ask them to send the same message to their lawmakers and the Governor. Please share social media posts (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) and messages on your profiles to help get the word out. If you are on Facebook please join this group. Post messages of support for Vermont's colleges on Front Porch Forum. Lastly, if you have not already, sign the growing online petition that now has over 47,000 signatures.

Thanks in advance for your help. We are all in this fight together and if we keep the pressure on we will succeed in securing a bright future for all of our VSC campuses.

Delta Dental Supplement Plan Announces July Premium Holiday

Delta Dental's Supplemental Plan Division contacted VSEA this week with news that there will be a premium holiday in July for VSEA members who participate in the optional benefit plan. Delta Dental will be sharing more details soon about the July premium holiday, and WIA will share whatever is received with members.

The Supplemental Plan is also announcing that, for the plan year beginning July 20, the maximum allowance is being increased from \$1000 to \$1250.



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Vermont NEA Conducting Child Care Survey. VSEA Members Invited To Participate

The Vermont National Education Association (VtNEA) is reaching out to VSEA members to complete a survey about your experiences related to child care in the age of COVID-19.

The NEA has put together a very short, simple 11-question survey for parents / caregivers, asking how your child or children's distance learning is going and inquiring about what other child care-related social / economic struggles you might be facing as this time. The survey is offered in seven different languages.

Find A Link To The NEA Child Care Survey On VSEA.org

Green Up Day Is May 30!

May 30 marks Green Up Day's 50th anniversary, and VSEA is encouraging members to participate, practicing social distancing, of course, which should not be an issue with this activity, as people can be safely spaced.

This year, Green Up Day provides an opportunity for VSEA members to get outside, get some fresh air and perform great civic duty by cleaning up miles of Vermont roads.

VSEA Board member and Brattleboro Chapter President Robin Rieske will be participating, saying, "Green Up Day provides a sense of commitment to where we live and to each other. It is about healthy surroundings, and it is about connecting our communities with a goal for common greatness. Green Up is a well-loved event that will bring some normalcy to our communities and will help contribute to the physical, social and mental health of Vermonters as much as their Green Up activities will help beautify our state."

Green Up Day Bag Pickup Locations & More Information Available on VSEA.org



AFLAC Insurance Enrollment: Sign Up Through VSEA!

WIA was asked by VSEA Benefits Administrator, Joanne Woodcock, to include the following in this week's newsletter:

Dear Friends,

During these uncertain times, it has never been more important than now to protect your income.

Did you know that as a VSEA member, you are eligible for guaranteed issued disability with AFLAC through the convenience of payroll deduction! The State does not offer short term disability insurance other than accrued sick time.

If you would like to discuss this valuable VSEA member benefit in more detail, please call me.

I will call you on the day and time you select. Please be in front of a computer at the time of your appointment.

There are many advantages to VSEA membership. Please check them out at www.vsea.org.

Thank you and I hope you stay well and safe.

Best regards,
Joanne

Joanne Woodcock
VSEA Benefits Administrator
888-510-4467
Joanne@vseainsurance.com



Now on Instagram!
[instagram.com/vseaunite](https://www.instagram.com/vseaunite)

QUOTE OF THE WEEK!

"We cannot defeat this pandemic if our front line workers are faced with a pink slip."

AFSCME International President Lee Saunders, commenting in a *Portland (ME) Press Herald* story this week about Maine lawmakers "pleading" for federal assistance. Saunders adds that, last week alone, governments at all levels across the nation shed more than one million public sector jobs – more than the total lost during the Great Recession of 2009.

VSEA's Spring Membership Drive!

Recruit Members, Win Prizes!

After a very successful membership-recruitment initiative this past winter, VSEA is excited to announce a new membership drive for the next quarter!

Never forget that ongoing recruitment is vital to the strength of your union!

- Members who recruit **TWO** members will receive a **VSEA insulated travel mug**;
- Members who recruit **FIVE** new members will receive a **dues holiday for a month**; and
- Members who recruit **TEN** new members will receive a check for **\$50!**

Every time you recruit a new member between now and May 31, your name is entered into a drawing. **Four names will be pulled at random and winners will receive a check for \$100!**

Just be sure your recruits include your name in the "Recruited by" section of the VSEA Membership Application.

TALKING POINTS:

Amid Pandemic, Hospitals Lay Off 1.4M Workers In April

NPR aired a piece this week about the “ironic twist” of 1.4 million health care workers being laid off in the midst of a pandemic.

Here are a couple of the comments from guests in the piece:

“A spokesperson for her hospital said they’ve, quote, ‘experienced financial challenges as a result of the pandemic.’ and they’re not the only ones. The American Hospital Association has predicted that U.S. health systems will lose \$200 billion through June. Most of that loss revenue is because hospitals are no longer performing elective procedures. And because hospitals aren’t making very much money, they can’t afford to keep everyone on staff.”

“The Federal Government has distributed some of the \$100 billion provider relief fund to hospitals. Nickels says it’s too early to tell whether those funds will help retain workers. But the American Federation of Teachers, which is the second-largest nurses’ union, says it’s not enough. It’s identified at least 200 hospitals nationwide that have cut worker hours. AFT president Randi Weingarten says she’s never seen health care so affected by economic forces.”

One Third Of COVID-19 U.S. Deaths Are Nursing Home Workers Or Residents

The New York Times published a story this week, highlighting the high number of COVID-19 deaths occurring in America’s nursing homes, tragically taking the lives of both residents and workers.

From the story:

At least 28,100 residents and workers have died from the coronavirus at nursing homes and other long-term care facilities for older adults in the United States, according to a New York Times database. The virus so far has infected more than 153,000 at some 7,700 facilities.

While just 11 percent of the country’s cases have occurred in long-term care facilities, deaths related to Covid-19 in these facilities account for more than a third of the country’s pandemic fatalities.

The share of deaths tied to long-term care facilities for older adults is even more stark at the state level. In 14 states, the number of residents and workers who have died accounts for more than half of all deaths from the virus.

Note: VSEA members working at the Vermont Veterans’ Home saw the writing on the wall early about how COVID-19 was hitting America’s nursing homes especially hard. To their credit, they sounded the alarm early and demanded the Home’s management implement aggressive preventive measures.

Reminder: VSEA Election Update: Board Approves Online Petition-Signature Gathering For Interested Candidate

The VSEA Board of Trustees met this week to discuss a number of different topics, including how to resolve an issue around how members interested in running for a Board seat this year can collect required petition signatures in the age of COVID-19.

Here are the options the Board approved:

- **If safely able**, a member-candidate can still collect 25 physical petition signatures from VSEA full-fledged members; or
- Participate in a modified petition process to allowing member-candidates to submit their interest in running for a Board seat to VSEA, via email, by June 1, 2020. The firm, Simply Voting, will then send out an electronic petition to all VSEA members. The electronic petition will list the names of all the candidates who submitted a request or self-nomination electronically. In order to qualify for the ballot, the member-candidate must receive at least 25 “votes” / electronic signatures from full-fledged members on his or her petition. An official ballot will then be sent to members who belong to the specific Unit or Chapter



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where there's a race. The candidate who gets the most votes wins. **Again, the deadline for members to send an email to vsea@vsea.org, stating your desire to have your name placed on an electronic petition, is June 1.**

Here again are the Board seats up for election. If you are able to safely gather signatures from your colleagues, each Board seat mentioned below links to PDF petitions:

- Supervisory (three-year seat)
- Corrections (three-year seat)
- VSHA/DG (three-year seat)
- District 4 - Franklin / Grand Isle / Chittenden / Addison (three-year seat)

If you have a question about your eligibility, please email VSEA Organizing Director Amy Kinsell at akinsell@vsea.org.

Reminder: Employees Who Fail To Comply With Mask Directive Could Be Disciplined

During these very uncertain times, VSEA is reminding state employees not to ignore a directive from your supervisor to wear a protective mask while at work. Remember, if you defy your supervisor's mask directive, you may face allegations of insubordination, which could result in management taking disciplinary action against you.

VSEA is strongly advising all employees to comply with the mask directive, to protect your health and the health of your co-workers.

Getting Ready To Retire? Retired Already? Join The VSEA Retired Members' Chapter!

Long-time VSEA activist and leader Terry Lefebvre is asking VSEA members getting ready to retire to join the VSEA Retirees' Chapter to continue to be an active and engaged union member, even in retirement. Lefebvre also appeals to VSEA members to talk up the co-workers they know who might be preparing to retire. If you already belong to the Retired Members' Chapter, a big thanks to you.

Learn more about the VSEA Retired Members' Chapter by calling 802-223-5247 or emailing VSEARetirees@gmail.com. You can also log onto www.vsea.org/retirees

NEXT WEEK'S CALENDAR:

Due to coronavirus, all VSEA meetings are canceled until further notice.

Please note: VSEA HQ (155 State Street, Montpelier) is closed due to COVID-19 concerns. VSEA staff is working remotely. If you have questions, please call 802-223-5247 or email vsea@vsea.org.



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Vermont State Employees' Association
155 State Street, Montpelier, VT 05602
(802) 223-5247
vsea@vsea.org

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