



Week In Action Newsletter

May 29, 2020

Read the full newsletter with links and more content on VSEA.org



SAO Employees Reach Tentative Agreement On First-Ever Union Contract!

In some welcome good news, employees working in State's Attorney's Offices (SAO) across Vermont will soon be voting for the first time ever on a tentative contract agreement that the workers' Bargaining Team reached this week with the SAO.

Throwback to 2007, when Vermont would allow state employees release time from work each Green Up Day to go out and help with clean up efforts. This group of state employees is pictured, reporting for duty at the Middlesex AOT garage. May 30 marks Green Up Day's 50th anniversary.

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On Wednesday night, VSEA Labor Relations Director Gary Hoadley sent a message to SAO employees in the Unit that a tentative agreement had been reached.

If ratified, the two-year contract would become effective on July 1, 2020, and expire on June 30, 2022. SAO Unit members are being sent an email that includes a copy of the tentative contract settlement and a summary sheet with specific highlights, along with instructions for electronic voting. Ratification requires membership approval of "50% plus 1" of the eligible SAO members voting on the tentative agreement.

"Back in December 2018, VSEA committed to helping the SAO employees get the wages, benefits and working conditions they want and deserve," VSEA President Dave Bellini tells WIA. "Big congratulations to them and their Bargaining Team on staying strong and finally getting us to where we are today, which is the SAO employees getting to vote on a first-ever contract. Great work all around."

Tomorrow Is Green Up Day!

Tomorrow marks Vermont 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

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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 up bright and early tomorrow to participate, 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](https://vsea.org)

Reminder! COVID-19 Agreement Extended Until June 6

Just a reminder that the State and the VSEA’s Non-Management, Corrections, and Supervisory Units agreed last Friday to extend the terms of the current COVID-19 Side Letter Agreement of April 5, 2020, by one additional pay period to remain in effect until Saturday, June 6, 2020.

Vermont’s Judiciary Branch is also extended its agreement thru June 6.



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VSEA Members Urged To Complete COVID-19 Experience Survey

VSEA Executive Director Steve Howard sent an email to members on Wednesday, which included a link to a short, three-question survey about how the COVID-19 crisis is impacting your professional and personal life, both negatively and positively. Your feedback is important and will help VSEA formulate bargaining and legislative strategies to better aid state employees during this current crisis or any future pandemics.

Take the survey on [VSEA.org](https://vsea.org)

VSEA Strategic Analyst Talks Budget On *WDEV*’s Equal Time Radio

Equal Time Radio with Traven, which airs every Tuesday on *WDEV*, invited VSEA Strategic Analyst Adam Norton to be a guest on this week’s show, where Norton provided the host with an overview of Vermont’s coming budget storm and some of the anticipated fallout. Norton also offered up some ways to address the budget deficit that don’t involve cutting state services or positions, and he addressed the Vermont State Colleges’ current funding crisis.

Listen on [VSEA.org](https://vsea.org)

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

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State Colleges to keep them all open and operating.”

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.

National Group Continues To Seeks To Unite Mask Makers

Reminiscent of a World War 2-style public mobilization, the national coalition, MasksNOW, reached out recently to VSEA to request help recruiting Vermonters to sew masks to help in America's (and the world's) fight against COVID-19.

Here's how the coalition describes its mission on its website:

The Masks Now Coalition is a grassroots movement of volunteers and their groups, led by nineteen organizers directing over 11,000 volunteers who banded together in response to the urgent national shortage of masks brought on by the novel coronavirus outbreak in America.

We've got volunteers in every state, Washington D.C., and Puerto Rico ready to answer the call from over 1,100 organizations including more than 350 hospitals in 42 states which have made public appeals for homesewn masks.

In an effort to help curb medical supply shortages as we battle COVID-19, we are requesting sewists to make masks and other supplies for use by patients, healthcare workers, at-risk community members, and essential workers, including postal workers, grocery store workers, manufacturing personnel, and more.

That's why we're looking for volunteers to sew masks and handle the logistics of distribution in every state, DC, and Puerto Rico.

Note: The coalition is also providing masks to those in need.

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

TALKING POINTS:

California Prepared To Reassign State Employees To Be COVID Contact Tracers

Governing posted a story this week, titled, Volunteer or Be Reassigned to Virus Response, which reports on efforts by Gov. Gavin Newsom's administration to recruit 10,000 COVID Contact Tracers.

To date, the state has recruited just 950 Contact Tracers, which prompted Newsom this week to directly ask state employees to volunteer to be reassigned to be a tracer. If Newsom can't get the number of tracers desired, an administration spokesperson reminded that the state has the authority to reassign state employees to the work.

"Our expectation is that state employees will continue to volunteer for contact tracing because they understand the critical nature of this effort and recognize that public service involves stepping up for our fellow Californians during an emergency or disaster," the spokesperson said in an email. "During any statewide emergency, and in the case of slowing the spread of COVID-19 to protect public health, state workers can be reassigned as disaster services workers to assist with response and recovery efforts."



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QUOTE OF THE WEEK!

"It's not uncommon when one of our young Vermonters takes a driver's exam for them to bring their whole family. How do we manage to protect the public as well as our employees in that situation?"

Vermont DMV Commissioner Wanda Minoli, commenting in a *VT Digger* story today about the DMV beginning to make re-opening plans. Minoli offered no specifics on what protections will be offered to the public and employees, saying she was meeting with the State this weekend to try to finalize a plan.

Feds Push Back Against COVID-19 Worker Protection Standard

Last week, the national AFL-CIO filed a petition to compel the federal Labor Department to issue an emergency temporary standard that would offer stronger protection for U.S. workers against the coronavirus as states begin to reopen. This week, *LAW360* reported on the the federal Labor Secretary response.

"At OSHA ... we've been putting out extensive guidance for businesses and workers on the measures that we and the [Centers for Disease Control And Prevention] believe are necessary for a safe workplace," the Secretary said. "There have been some asking us to issue a mandatory rule. We have not seen that that would be of any incremental value on top of the guidance we've provided and on top of the significant enforcement

authority we already have in cases where employers aren't doing what needs to be done to protect those workers who return."

The AFL-CIO's petition notes that OSHA's personal protective equipment standard, which includes

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direction on masks and eye covers, leaves decisions to mandate usage and to supply them to workers up to employers.

Commentary Makes Three Arguments For States Getting Help From The Feds

A commentary that posted to *Governing* this week by former National Governors Association Executive Director Raymond Scheppach, that calls on state and local leaders to apply even greater pressure to gain passage of legislation to provide federal aid to states and local municipalities.

The author argues that:

- The economy will not recover anytime soon without such assistance;
- Good partners help each other; and
- There are two precedents that worked well. Both in 2003 and 2009, Congress recognized that it needed to assist states in order to offset their proposed budget cuts and tax increases and to stabilize the economy.

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:

June 2

VSEA Board Of Trustees' Meeting
Online
9:00 a.m.

Due to coronavirus, all other 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.



**Thanks for reading *Week In Action!*
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