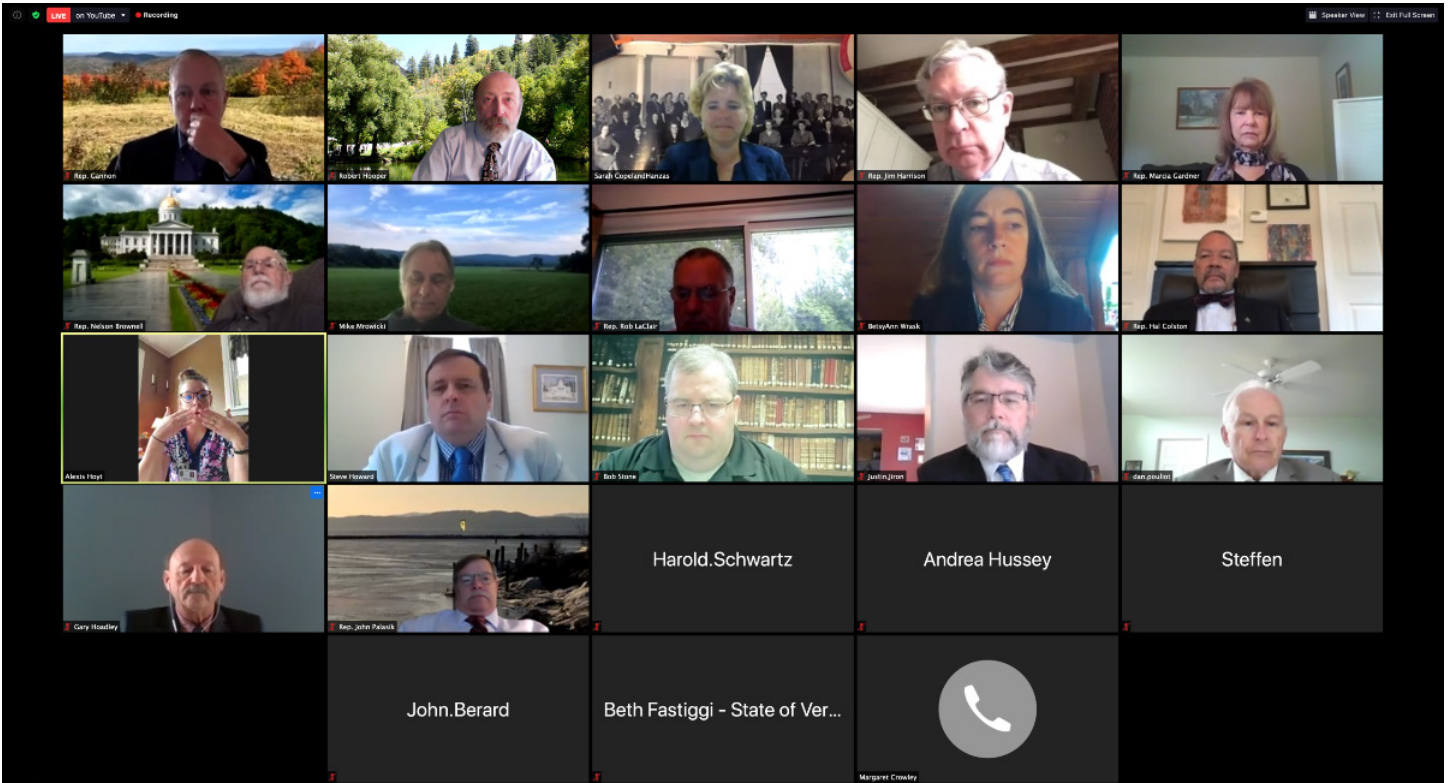




Week In Action Newsletter

June 5, 2020

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THIS WEEK:

VSEA Members Testify On Pay Act ... page 2

VSEA Board Passes Three Resolutions Of Note This Week ... page 2

BGS Posts New Form To Report Workplace Incidents ... page 3

VSEA Members Urged To Complete COVID-19 Experience Survey ... page 3

COVID-19 Delays State's Corrections Investigation ... page 3

Not Funny! Motorist Throws Large Pickle At AOT Member ... page 4

DCF Commissioner Retiring ... page 4

Revamped VSEA Website Is Live! ... page 4

Quote of the Week! ... page 4

..... **And More!**

VSEA members and staff remotely provided pro-Pay Act testimony this week to members of the House Government Operations Committee. More on page 2.

VSEA Members Will Receive Negotiated July 1 Pay Increase

State's Paid Leave Deal With VSEA On Hold

VTDigger reports this week on an announcement from the State that, come July 1, exempt employees will have their pay increase frozen, but VSEA members will receive their negotiated pay increase. However, the State also informed VSEA it would not be implementing a paid leave proposal that was agreed to by both parties in the most recent round of negotiations.

From the *VTDigger* story:

Continued on page 2

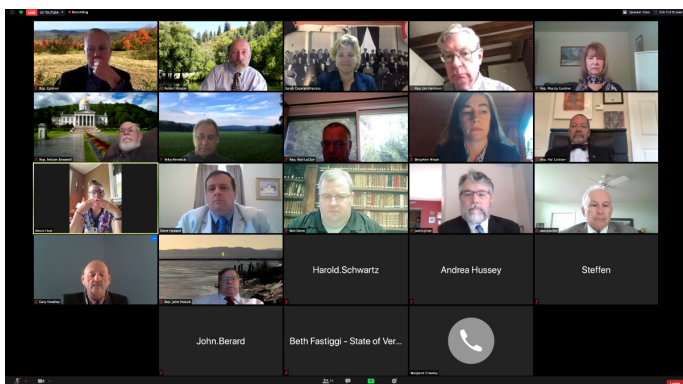
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Steve Howard, the executive director of the union, said that the [State]’s ongoing support for the contract signals that [it] believes “all state employees are essential employees.”

But Howard said that state employees still want to see a paid family leave program next year, however, and that the [State] has an “obligation” to put it in place.

“We were happy to accept their proposal, it was their proposal,” Howard said of the paid family leave program. “And we are going to work with them to see that state employees receive that benefit.”

VSEA Members Testify On Pay Act



Several VSEA members testified Tuesday, via Zoom, to the House Government Operations Committee; each making a strong case for full funding of the Pay Act. Big thanks to the following VSEA members for your testimony:

- Margaret Crowley (Judiciary)
- Steffen Flibotte (Corrections)
- Alexis Hoyt (RN, Vets’ Home)
- Justin Jiron (State Attorneys’ Office)
- Lt. Barbara Kessler (DPS, VSP)
- Robert Stone (DPS, Asst. State Fire Marshal)

What Is The “Pay Act”?

If you’re unsure what the Pay Act is exactly, here’s a quick primer:

Every two years, legislation called the Pay Act is introduced to determine what level of funding the

collective bargaining agreements between VSEA and the State receive. This bill begins its journey in the House Government Operations Committee. The Act is one of VSEA’s top legislative priorities each biennium. While the State is legally obligated to honor any contracts negotiated with the Union, the legislature has been known to underfund these agreements and ask departments and agencies to use vacancy savings to make up the difference – this is commonly referred to as “eating the Pay Act.” In a utopian world, departments and agencies could absorb these costs by leaving positions unfilled throughout state government, but the recession(s), pandemic, etc., means these savings are in short supply. Thanks to the members who testified this week.

Watch VSEA Member Pay Act Testimony on VSEA.org

VSEA Board Passes Three Resolutions Of Note This Week

VSEA’s Board of Trustees met this week, via Zoom, and the body passed three resolutions of note for VSEA to fulfill, including:

- **Issue a formal statement on death of George Floyd**, which happened on Wednesday. It reads: “VSEA stands in solidarity with George Floyd’s family. We demand justice for George Floyd. We demand an end to unnecessary violence at the hands of police who have sworn to serve and protect. Our union stands with the Black Lives Matter movement.”
- **Issue a press statement of support for workers at the Brattleboro Retreat**, which also happened on Wednesday. It reads: “The Vermont State Employees’ Association’s (VSEA) Board of Trustees voted yesterday to issue a statement of support for the beleaguered workforce at the Brattleboro Retreat, who continue to struggle with a hostile employer, who they allege is repeatedly violating their fundamental employee rights. VSEA is also disturbed by a new report that union president Sy Creamer was fired Monday, and VSEA



Continued from page 2:

stands ready to help Creamer in any way it can, as she launches her justified fight for reinstatement. VSEA is also sending solidarity to every Brattleboro Retreat UNAP member, as they prepare to picket the Retreat tomorrow to demand the reinstatement of their president.”

- **Promote a June 9 picket by AFSCME Local 1343 Burlington City workers**, which posted to VSEA’s Facebook page on Tuesday. View picket’s official Facebook page on VSEA.org.

Reminder: May 5, 2020 Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes Posted To VSEA.org

BGS Posts New Form To Report Workplace Incidents

BGS Office of State Safety and Security Director William McSalis asked VSEA to let members know that there is a new link for state employees to report workplace incidents of all types.

“BGS’ new ‘Safety and Security Incident Report (SSIR)’ was developed in house, and we believe that the new system is easier to use for the employee making the report,” explains McSalis. “It also and provides greater functionality for our Threat Investigators and Administrators.”

McSalis adds that employees experiencing difficulty, or who or have questions or concerns, should contact the State Safety and Security Duty Officer for assistance, 24/7, at (802) 828-0777.

New BGS Incident Report Forms can be found on VSEA.org

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

COVID-19 Delays State’s Corrections Investigation

Seven Days reports this week that the State has suspended its investigation into allegations of wrongdoing at the Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility due to safety concerns related to the coronavirus outbreak.

“It has been suspended and as soon as we have an opportunity to open up our facilities again it will be reestablished,” Secretary of Human Services Mike Smith tells *Seven Days*. “It hasn’t been forgotten.”

Here’s how VSEA Executive Director Steve Howard responded in December 2019 to news of the State’s investigation at Chittenden:

“I would describe [Smith’s idea] as premature and a little sensational at the moment,” adding that there are hundreds of corrections officers and supervisors who are “upstanding, respectable” employees, “and to paint them all with a broad brush because of allegations against a few people seems to be unfair.” However, Howard added his members welcomed the broader review of Vermont’s prisons. “We have been for many years trying to call attention to what we see as a chaotic environment at many correctional facilities across the state.”



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Not Funny! Motorist Throws Large Pickle At AOT Member

Multiple news outlets aired a story this week about VSEA 30-plus-year AOT member Carl Hoffman, who was vehicle spotting at the time, having a “large pickle” thrown at him from a passing car for no apparent reason. Hoffman told officers responding to the scene that the projectile “caused him injury.”

From a June 2 *Bennington Banner* story:

Vermont State Police charged Christoph Herrmannsdoerfer, 34, with simple assault after he reportedly threw an object out of a moving vehicle, striking a state employee working by the roadside.

The object was “later determined to be a large pickle,” according to the state police. The pickle struck Carl Hoffman, 59, of the Agency of Transportation, “causing him pain,” Trooper Raymond Witkowski said in a release.

Hoffman didn’t suffer any injuries, Witkowski told the Banner, though his shoes got splattered with pickle juice.

When police later spoke to Herrmannsdoerfer, he couldn’t explain why he threw the pickle at Hoffman, Witkowski said. There’s also no indication the two men knew each other or that the incident was connected to any dispute.

Hoffman, part of a crew monitoring the entry of out-of-state cars into Vermont, wasn’t on duty on Tuesday; colleagues said he’d taken the day off.

State police said troopers were dispatched to the border crossing along Route 7 shortly before 6 p.m. Monday, when they received a report that a VTrans employee on site had been assaulted.

Note: While this is indeed an unusual event, it is not funny, as we have now learned that any kind of projectile thrown from a moving vehicle can cause injury to an AOT worker or, in fact, any person hit by the object.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK!

“Who knows where the areas would be of reduction, because there were no proposed reductions by the governor. The Legislature has to do its work and just not leave carte blanche reductions for the administration to have, without us weighing in.”

Vermont House Appropriations Committee Chair Kitty Toll (D-Danville), commenting in a *VTDigger* story this week about Toll’s committee deciding against including the State’s proposed additional 8% cut to agencies and departments in the “skinny” budget proposal passed out of committee.

DCF Commissioner Retiring

After five years at the helm, Seven Days reports Thursday that DCF Commissioner Ken Schatz has announced that he is retiring from state government and will be replaced by DCF Deputy Commissioner Sean Brown.

“I’ve really learned a lot from the people that I’ve worked with, families I’ve come into contact with and other professionals,” Schatz says. “And I feel very good about the work we’ve done together to support children and families in Vermont.”

Revamped VSEA Website Is Live!

VSEA’s Communications Department is pleased to report that long-overdue maintenance on your union’s website has been completed, and the site is now live.

“Members, retirees and visitors to the revamped site will notice it has a slightly different look and that



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the site’s functionality is improved, especially on mobile devices,” explains VSEA Communications Specialist Kris Lizzari. “We understand there is still some fine-tuning to do, so members and retirees experiencing issues with the site should contact the VSEA Communications Department. Also share any corrections to posted information you may discover.”

Lizzari adds that members can now register for new VSEA website accounts. as well as access the online VSEA Advantage Discount Program.

TALKING POINTS!

AFSCME Burlington City Workers Conducting Picket On Tuesday

VSEA’s Board of Trustees is encouraging members and retirees to attend a Tuesday, June 9, AFSCME/ AFL-CIO picket in Burlington to protest the Burlington Mayor’s demand for city employees, including essential workers, to open their contracts to discuss economic concessions, or face layoffs.

The picket begins at 3:30 p.m., and picketers are meeting at the Burlington DPW, 645 Pine Street, practicing safe social distancing.

VSEA’s Board is encouraging members and retirees who are able to attend, with a mask, of course. Wear a VSEA shirt or carry a sign.

View picket’s official Facebook page on VSEA.org



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Colorado Senate Passes Bill To Grant State Workers Collective Bargaining Rights

The Colorado Partnership For Quality Jobs and Services Act, HB-1153, passed the Colorado Senate this week.

The bill would allow state employees to collectively bargain on pay, benefits and terms of employment.

“Right now, the unfortunate reality is that 1 in 5 Colorado’s state jobs remain unfilled, forcing state employees to work multiple jobs and unconventional hours,” said bill sponsor Senate President Leroy Garcia, Democrat who represents Pueblo. “With this legislation, workers will have the ability to negotiate and get some well-earned relief — giving them the opportunity to have their voices heard.”

HB-1153 requires the state of Colorado to participate in good faith during the bargaining and partnership processes.

The bill now goes back to the House for final consideration of Senate amendments.

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

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