



Week In Action Newsletter

August 23, 2019

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

Support Your Bargaining Team!

**Executive Branch Bargaining Teams
Sit Down With State For Coordinated
Bargaining, Page 2**

ENDING SOON! A reminder that your union's 2019 membership-recruitment drive is underway. Rewards for recruiting new members between now and **September 1!**

- **2 new members -**
Dunkin Donuts gift card;
- **5 new members -**
VSEA insulated coffee mug;
- **10 new members -**
\$50 VISA gift card!

Bonus! Recruit a new member and receive an entry in a drawing to win one of four \$300 prizes to be awarded at VSEA's 2019 Annual Meeting! Each new recruit earns you an additional entry! Just be sure to have your recruits add your name in the "Recruited By" line of the VSEA Membership Application.

VSEA Strongly Disputes Local Television Station's Report On Corrections Staffing Levels

Local Vermont television station WCAX aired a story this week that featured Department of Corrections Commissioner Mike Touchette discussing Vermont prison staffing levels. Touchette tells the reporter that our state is staffing better than many other states and it's essentially not a big issue, but he fails to qualify his statement with an explanation of the understaffing problems many VSEA Corrections members say are still chronic daily throughout Vermont's prison system.

In response to the WCAX story, VSEA issued the following press release on Monday afternoon:

VSEA Blasts WCAX Story On Prison Staffing

VSEA President Dave Bellini and VSEA Board of Trustees member Joe Silvestri are blasting a story that aired last night on WCAX about Vermont Corrections staffing levels. In the piece, Department of Corrections Commissioner Mike Touchette tells a WCAX reporter that staffing is not an issue at Vermont's correctional facilities; a statement Bellini, Silvestri and a majority of VSEA Corrections Unit members say is simply false.

"VSEA members have been providing testimony to lawmakers—for years— about chronic issues of understaffing, forced overtime and temp use inside Vermont's prisons," says Bellini. "If the WCAX reporter had reached out to the people actually doing the work inside prisons—or VSEA—for comment, I can assure you he would have a



completely different take on the situation.”

“I’m pretty certain Commissioner Touchette has heard frontline DOC corrections employees’ calls for increased staffing loud and clear, and that he understands the staffing reality a lot more than he let on to WCAX,” adds VSEA Board member and DOC employee Joe Silvestri. “We’ve communicated to him over and over that our prisons are not properly staffed and correctional officers are being forced to do mandated overtime regularly. The commissioner stretched the truth here, and I think he knows it.”

Silvestri is right, apparently. Commissioner Touchette sent an email to all DOC staff today about the WCAX interview. In it, he writes:

“Overtime rates are still very high for Vermont staff. Staff are working way too many hours and I recognize that this not only impacts your personal and family lives, but also makes doing the work even more difficult when you are tired.

My comments in this interview were in no way intended to diminish the realities of the Vermont correctional staffing needs. I apologize if it was construed as failing to recognize that we still have a lot of work to do, because we do.”

Note: WCAX is offering to do a follow-up to this story to allow VSEA Corrections members to weigh in personally about staffing and other issues.

Possible Dues Increase Proposal Warned

On Monday, the VSEA Board of Trustees WARNed members via email about “the potential” for a dues-increase proposal to be introduced at this year’s VSEA Annual Meeting on September 14 at the Okemo Resort in Ludlow.

The proposal WARN was sent to the primary email address that VSEA currently has on file for you. If you do not recall receiving an email from

VSEA headquarters on August 19, please look in your “Other” or “Spam” folders before contacting headquarters to request a copy. You can update your contact information here anytime.

Don’t Recall Seeing This Email? You can view a copy of the email on VSEA.org (Log-in required).

Executive Branch Bargaining Teams Sit Down With State For Coordinated Bargaining

VSEA’s Non-Management, Corrections and Supervisory Unit Bargaining Teams will meet jointly with State negotiators on Tuesday, August 27, to conduct the first session of “coordinated bargaining” on universal issues, like wages and benefits. Later in the week, individual Units will meet with State negotiators to bargain Unit-specific issues.

Labor Relations Director Gary Hoadley is sharing meeting summaries on VSEA’s website. The summaries are in the “Members Only” section of VSEA.org. Only registered users can view. Log onto VSEA.org to register a free account.

After logging in to VSEA.org, registered members can navigate to the “Members Only” drop-down menu, located in the homepage’s left-hand column. You can expand a drop-down from there and select “Negotiation Notes From VSEA Director of Labor Relations Gary Hoadley” or you can click “Member-Only Documents” and then on the following page, click the same heading.

If you have any questions please email ghoadley@vsea.org

Bargaining Meeting Dates Added To The VSEA.org Calendar

View the full VSEA Calendar on VSEA.org



Central Vermont Chapter Passes Climate Change Resolution

The *Times Argus* published a story on August 14 about members of VSEA's Central Vermont Chapter passing and now championing a climate change proposal for the union that could be a topic of discussion at this year's VSEA Annual Meeting in September.

VSEA members Bob Atchinson and Ned Swanberg drafted the proposal, which reads, in part:

"The members of the Central Vermont Chapter of the Vermont State Employees' Association calls on all union members and all governments and peoples worldwide to declare a Climate Emergency."

As the story details, the members' proposal also includes a call to action and steps to be taken by individuals and groups to achieve the goal to reduce climate change worldwide.

VSEA Executive Director Steve Howard is quoted in the story, saying it's not yet clear if VSEA would consider adopting the Central Vermont Chapter's climate emergency proposal at its Annual Meeting in September.

"Whether the union as a whole will, is not clear at this point," he says. "Members can certainly bring up anything that is not on the agenda. And there are members of VSEA who are interested in the impacts of climate change."

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Now on Instagram!

[instagram.com/vseaunite](https://www.instagram.com/vseaunite)

To Narrow Spending Gap, State Asks Depts. & Agencies To Find 20% Savings, But There Is Another Way?

Given the State's charge to department and agency heads to come up with a 20% reduction in spending by August 30 to "help close the gap between the projected growth in spending and available revenues," it might be time to revisit narrowing Vermont's income gap by asking the state's wealthiest to pay a little more.

VTDigger, June 2019: *State Asks Agencies for Plan to Cut Growing Spending Gap by 20%*

Remember, according to a January 2018 Public Assets Institute report, from 2006 to 2016, average nominal income for the top 5 percent of Vermont earners rose 42 percent. Over the same period, the bottom fifth of earners saw an average increase of 6 percent.

VTDigger, January 2018 Story: *Report Finds Poverty and Income Gap Growing in Vermont*

And then there's this 2011 flashback from a *Seven Days* column penned by Shay Totten:

"It's not every day that a group of Vermonters asks to be taxed more. But that's just what happened last week when 50 of the state's wealthiest residents wrote Gov. Peter Shumlin a letter to say they'd pony up to help close the state's \$176 million budget gap and keep services intact for the poor, elderly and disabled."

Sadly, nothing came of the letter writers' request and cuts to state jobs and services were enacted instead as the primary way to balance Vermont's budget.

So what do you think? Is it time? If so, talk with



your local lawmakers about the idea to see if they are supportive. Remember, a 20% reduction in spending could translate to a lot of pain for Vermont's public services and the Vermonters who provide them daily.

It's VSEA Chapter Annual Meeting Season

VSEA Chapter Annual Meetings are currently being held statewide, in advance of VSEA's Annual Meeting in September. This is your Chapter's most important meeting of the year, as this is often the meeting where Chapter officer elections are conducted and Chapter business is discussed and decisions and expenditures approved, or not.

Here is a list of upcoming Chapter Annual Meetings

White River Junction Chapter

Thursday, August 29

12:00 p.m.

State Office Building

118 Prospect Street

First Floor Conference Room, Suite 300

White River Junction

QUOTE OF THE WEEK!

"If we are serious about rebuilding the middle class in America, we have got to rebuild, strengthen and expand the trade union movement in America."

Vermont U.S. Senator and presidential candidate Bernie Sanders, on August 21, announcing his comprehensive plan to "revive and empower organized labor." CNN and several other outlets aired stories about the rollout of Sanders' "Workplace Democracy Plan."

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facebook.com/vseaunite

TALKING POINTS:

Sign Petition To Support Nurses At Brattleboro Memorial Hospital!

Nurses, represented by the American Federation of Teachers and working at Brattleboro Memorial Hospital, are currently in negotiations with management for a new contract.

An online petition is now available for the public to show its support for the nurses and their fight to negotiate:

- A safe workplace with the necessary tools and staffing to foster the best care that our friends and family rely on;

- Parity with other area Hospitals as a means to reducing the reliance on travelers and to recruit and retain trained nurses, technicians and ancillary staff here in Windham County; and
- Improved benefits to ensure that nurses can retire with dignity and have expanded access to area health care.

Sign The Nurses' Petition:

<http://bit.ly/SignOnline2019>



Vermont Labor Relations Board Rules Against Burlington Teachers

Even though the rules were changed after the fact, Burlington teachers seeking to be paid for four days they were on strike in September 2017 were denied restitution this week by the Vermont Labor Relations Board (VLRB).

From an August 19 *VT Digger* story:

The union (Burlington Education Association) says teachers were promised back pay if the school year was extended by four days.

However, after the new contract was signed Burlington Superintendent Yaw Obeng changed plans, according to filings in the case.

On Oct. 25, 2017, Obeng advised Burlington teachers of the revised school calendar by switching teacher training days into school days in order to meet the state required length for a school year. So no extra days were scheduled.

The union argues this decision undercut the 2.5% salary increase the teachers were seeking and ultimately were awarded when the strike was resolved.

The union sought to address the revised calendar with the school board, “but the School District had no interest” and adopted the revised schedule without agreement from the teachers, according to the labor board ruling.

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

Learn More Online:

<https://www.vsea.org/retirees>

Kentucky Coal Miners Continue To Block Railroad Tracks, Demanding To Be Paid

The New York Times reported Monday on a three-week blockage of a railway by a group of Kentucky coal miners who are demanding to be paid for the coal (that they dug) being transported on the railway!

From the story:

A protest that began with five men blocking a train full of coal has grown into a small 24-hour tent city along some railroad tracks next to the highway. It has become a pilgrimage site for labor activists, a rallying point for the community — “a tailgate party on steroids,” as one local official approvingly put it. And it is the first organized miners’ protest that anyone can remember for decades in Harlan County, Ky., a place once virtually synonymous with bloody labor wars.

The railroad blockade began in late July, about a month after Blackjewel, the two-year-old company where the miners worked, suddenly declared bankruptcy. Blackjewel owned mines in four states, and employed over a thousand miners in central Appalachia.

Miners learned in the middle of an afternoon shift that Blackjewel was shutting down immediately and putting everyone out of work. It did so without filing a mandatory 60-day advance warning and without posting a bond, required by Kentucky law, to cover payroll.

Workers received no pay for their last week on the job. Then they learned that their paychecks for the previous two weeks had bounced. Bankruptcies and layoffs have become routine in the coal fields during a grueling industrywide decline, but no one seemed to recall anything quite like this.

“It’s no different from robbing a bank,” said Jeffrey Willig, a wiry 40-year-old father of six.



NEXT WEEK'S CALENDAR:

August 27

Awards & Scholarships Committee Meeting
VSEA HQ
155 State Street
Montpelier
8:00 a.m.

August 27

VSEA Executive Branch Units' Coordinated
Bargaining w/ State
Montpelier
8:30 a.m.

August 28

VSEA NMU Bargaining w/ State
Montpelier
8:30 a.m.

August 28

Employee Appreciation Day Event: Waterbury
State Office Complex
Courtyard (Sun)
Atrium (Rain)
Waterbury
11:30 a.m.

August 29

VSEA Corrections Unit Bargaining w/ State
Montpelier
Morning

August 29

VSEA Supervisory Unit Bargaining w/ State
Montpelier
Afternoon

August 29

Chapter Annual Meeting: White River Junction
State Office Building
118 Prospect Street
First Floor Conference Room. 300
White River Junction
12:00 p.m.

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