



WEEK IN ACTION!

Weekly News From Your Union ~ August 28 – September 1, 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!

➤ Subscribe to *Week In Action* Online: www.vsea.org/wia

Happy Labor Day VSEA!

VSEA President Dave Bellini and the VSEA Board of Trustees are wishing all members a safe and happy Labor Day 2017.

As we celebrate this important holiday, VSEA members are being asked to pause during the day to reflect a little on the gains unionized workers (including VSEA members since 1944) have been able to make for all American workers since organizing, including the 8-hour workday, paid sick leave, health care and retirement benefits, fair wages, a grievance process, whistleblower protections, the weekend and so much more. Remember, in far too many states right now, attempts are being made to take much of this away, and Vermont state employees are not, as we know, immune to attacks. This is why we must all be on guard and prepared to quickly come together to protect state employee livelihoods. We also have to be prepared to actively join in any and all fights to stop the race to the bottom that we are seeing in far too many states these days.

Thank you for your service and your solidarity! Vermont state employees truly do make Vermont work.

Some Recent Labor Day Stories & Columns

Minnesota Post: [Does Anyone Truly Remember Or Know What Labor Day Is About](#)

Chicago Now: [For A Change, Think About Labor On Labor Day](#)

Philadelphia Public Record: [LABOR DAY: The Spirit of Union in Difficult Times](#)

Center For American Progress: [The State of the U.S. Labor Market](#)

Daily Iowan: [We Must Remember Why We Celebrate Labor Day](#)

Detroit News: [Another Labor Day Without Labor Law Reform](#)

Washington Post: [\[New Administration's\] Ongoing Attack On Workers](#)

Common Dreams: [\[New Administration's\] Anti-Union Labor Day](#)

AFL-CIO: [Report Finds Americans' Freedom to Spend Time with Family Eroding](#)

The Guardian: [Alliance Plots Assault To "Defund And Defang" America's Unions](#)

Texas AFL-CIO Sets Up Relief Fund To Help Texas Workers Impacted by Flooding

VSEA members who want to help out Texas workers and their families who were adversely impacted by Hurricane Harvey's flooding over the past week can now [donate online to a special fund established by the Texas AFL-CIO](#).

From the donation page:

"The Texas Workers Relief Fund, a 501(c)(3) charitable fund, overseen by the Texas AFL-CIO, has been established to assist workers and their families in their time of need. Funds are provided to help stabilize situations when issues occur such as natural disasters. While we cannot make anyone whole, the Texas Workers Relief Fund sends a message of solidarity and the knowledge that working people affected by this disaster are supported by Brothers and Sisters across the nation."

Thanks in advance for any and all donations.

Monday Is Deadline To Vote In VSEA Officer Election!

Monday, September 4 is the final day to cast your vote in the 2017 VSEA Officer elections. All VSEA members should have received an email on August 14 that contained a link to your official online ballot to vote in the 2017 VSEA Officer election. The ballot link was emailed to members' home and work emails, provided VSEA had the correct email addresses on file.

VSEA thanks you for participating in your union's election process.

Monday Is The Deadline For NMU & Supervisory Unit Members To Self Nominate For Unit Executive Committees

VSEA's Elections, Rules and Nominating Committee sent an email this week to members of the Non-Management and Supervisory Units, informing them that Monday, September 4, is the deadline to self-nominate for a seat on the Unit Executive Committee.

All seats are open in both Units, and if you would like to be considered, please submit your name and a letter of intent to your Unit Chair no later than Monday. In your letter of intent, please include your job title, department/agency and your preferred email address and phone number.

Important! If you are physically attending VSEA's 73rd Annual Meeting in Stowe in September 9, you can self nominate there and **do not** need to submit a letter to your Unit Chair.

[Rebecca Trower](#) – NMU Chair

[Joe Silvestri](#) – Supervisory Chair

Monday Is The Deadline To Submit Your Name To Serve On The VSEA Retirement Board

There is an election this year for one (1) VSEA seat and one (1) VSEA alternate seat on the Vermont Employees' Retirement Board, elected from the VSEA membership at our Annual Meeting. Monday is the deadline to let VSEA know if you are interested in serving on the Vermont State Retirement Board—and wish to

have your name on the printed ballot for Annual Meeting. **Again, you must submit a letter of intent to the VSEA Elections Committee no later than Monday, September 4, 2017.** You should send an email to Ray Stout (rstout@vsea.org), or mail your letter to:

VSEA Elections Committee
VSEA Headquarters
155 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05602

Special Note: VSEA asks that interested candidates consider if they really have the ability to dedicate the time needed to fulfill the role of this position. For more information about the position, please contact Ray Stout at VSEA HQ, 223-5247. If you cannot ensure your attendance at the Retirement Board meetings, and fulfill the other requirements (including outside reading, conference calls, workshops, etc.), you may want to reconsider applying for this role.

VSEA Economic Services Division Labor / Management Committee Members Want Frontline Workers' Input

VSEA members sitting on the labor side of the table during labor / management committee meetings reached out Tuesday to frontline ESD workers to ask them about their most pressing issues and concerns, so they can ensure the Committee is addressing them in a timely fashion.

If you are an ESD worker who did not receive the Committee's email, please email VSEA's Committee Chair and ESD worker [William Wells](#).

State To Begin Year-Round Shuttle To Help With Parking Losses

As reported in *WIA* a few weeks back, many state employees working in Montpelier were abruptly informed that the State was not renewing its lease that allowed them to park for free in a popular downtown parking lot. Some of the employees reached out to VSEA for help with anticipated parking issues, and thanks in large part to VSEA's intervention and a continuing lobbying effort by frontline workers, BGS Commissioner Chris Cole's office sent this email to state employees in central Vermont this morning:

Good Morning from Commissioner Cole's Office,

Starting Tuesday, September 5th, the GMT Capital Shuttle will begin year-round free service between the Department of Labor, National Life and the Statehouse. A [timetable](#) is attached, along with the latest [Capital Complex parking map](#).

As summer ends and students return to school, we know that parking pressure within the Capital Complex will increase. We are starting the shuttle after Labor Day to accommodate the additional parking pressure since we no longer have the Carr Lot available to us for the long term. The City has indicated their new downtown transit center project will start in December. We believe that extending shuttle service will relieve some of that parking pressure.

We had originally made inquiries about a dedicated downtown loop, but GMT rightly expressed concerns about making a left turn at the uncontrolled intersection of Green Mountain Drive and Memorial Drive. In the event that a traffic signal is eventually installed in that location we will revisit the possibility of redesigning the route.

For those who absolutely need to park downtown, our daily parking survey has shown that the 144 State Street and Hopkins Lots have consistently had vacant spaces throughout the summer.

We will continue to monitor the parking situation and the shuttle service and make modifications as necessary.

Also, remember that through the [Capital Commuters](#) program, State Employees can receive discounts on bus passes and other downtown services.

Have a wonderful, long holiday weekend!

“Invitation Only” Conference Being Held To Discuss Public Employees’ Underfunded Pension Plans

The Vermont Business Roundtable is co-sponsoring an “invitation-only” conference about public employee pensions at Champlain College on Tuesday, October 10. It will feature a panel discussion that includes David Coates, who VSEA members will remember is Vermont’s resident alarmist about what he annually alleges is an impending crisis with Vermont public employees’ underfunded pension plans. This is a point that VSEA President Dave Bellini has publicly refuted on many occasions, explaining that the state employee pension plan is well funded and doing fine.

Coates is also expected to resurrect his tired talking point that state can realize savings by requiring new hires to enroll in a 401K-pension plan instead of employees’ current Defined Benefit Plan. This, however, is a talking point that is losing its luster of late, after several studies determined that workers are not investing properly in their 401Ks on their own and that states are not seeing the promised savings.

VSEA was pleased to see that State Treasurer Beth Pearce is also on the panel, and we trust she will defend state employee and teacher pension plans just as vehemently as she has in the past.

VSEA is urging interested members and retirees to register for the conference and see if you get an invite. [Learn more here](#) at VSEA.org

Reference Article:

Mother Jones: [Were 401K Plans Just A Big Mistake](#) (January 2017)

President Bellini Wants Your Cost-Savings Idea(s)!

Thankfully, Vermont’s public services were spared this week, when the legislature’s Joint Fiscal Committee voted to approve a State-drafted rescission plan to address a budget hole in this year’s budget—without any cuts. But heading into the January 2018 session. VSEA members already know it’s going to be

another case of “new budget year, new budget deficit.” It’s a Vermont problem that refuses to go away, and our state’s quality public services and many of the men and women who deliver them continue to suffer as a result.

In past deficit years, VSEA members have been asked to voluntarily submit cost-savings ideas to headquarters, in hopes that some of your ideas could be adopted and implemented, eventually generating the funds needed to save a service or jobs. In 2010, the Vermont Legislature followed VSEA’s lead, passing legislation to provide cash awards to state employees whose ideas were vetted by a special committee and found to generate savings. Unfortunately, this legislation sunset in 2012, and lawmakers have not resurrected it--yet.

For this reason—and in advance of the 2018 legislative session—VSEA President Dave Bellini is again asking frontline state employees with “department- or agency-specific cost-savings ideas” to please submit them to VSEA as soon as possible. Again, President Bellini is looking for department or agency-specific ideas, and nothing “philosophical,” he politely requests.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this very important request.

[Submit Your Cost-Saving\(s\) Idea\(s\) Here at VSEA.org](#)

VSEA Advantage Discount Program 2017 Ski Offers Begin

Keep your eyes on *WIA* in the coming weeks and months for announcements about 2017 ski pass offers from resorts across Vermont. VSEA Administrative Assistant Sue Devoid has been working hard to bring some new resorts into the program, so VSEA skiers will see some new names and deals this year.

New this week, the VSEA Advantage Discount Program is pleased to welcome back this popular long-time program participant:

Sugarbush Ski Resort

Sugarbush Resort is once again offering VSEA members discounts on 2017-18 Sugarbush Premium and Value Season Passes!

[Click Here For Pass Deal PDF Poster](#)

Sugarbush Premium Pass Includes:

- Unlimited skiing and riding at Lincoln Peak and Mt. Ellen; and
- 2600’ of vertical, 111 trails and 28 wooded areas.

Sugarbush Value Pass Includes:

- Unlimited daily access to Mt. Ellen; and
- Access to Lincoln Peak midweek, non-holiday and early / late season when Mt. Ellen is closed.

[Click Here To Order Pass\(es\)](#) [Please ensure you list VSEA as your sponsoring group!]

Important: Sugarbush has a September 20, 2017, deadline to order your pass(es) so don't delay.

Next Up: Killington

Only Two VSEA Steward Summits Remain In 2017. Register Today!

VSEA's Field Department continues to host a series of "Steward Summits" across Vermont this year. At the Summits, VSEA Stewards learn the latest developments relating to contract enforcement and safety and health and find out about the other challenges that lie ahead for state employees. Stewards attending are being asked to immediately help out by taking some of what they learn back to the worksite to educate their colleagues.

Three, six-hour trainings remain, and every current VSEA Steward is required to attend one session.

Here is the agenda for the August 18 summit in Waterbury at the Best Western Hotel:

8:30 a.m. – Registration & Breakfast

9:00 a.m. – Welcome & Introductions

9:30 a.m. to Noon – Grievances (Learning the Basics) or Safety & Health

1:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. – Role of Steward in an Investigation or Organizing (Member Recruitment)

2:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. – Bullying in the Workplace

Future Steward Summits (all 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.) are scheduled for:

October 20 – Hotel Coolidge, 39 South Main St., White River Junction

November 3 – Holiday Inn, 476 Holiday Drive, Rutland

[Register on VSEA.org](http://VSEA.org)

New Study Finds Public Employees Prefer A Defined Benefit Plan Over A 401K

These days, proposals to dump public-sector workers into 401K retirement plans are all the rage when states and lawmakers are looking for ways to save taxpayer dollars, but not so fast.

[Now, a new study](#), this time by the National Institute on Retirement Security, has found that:

1) Employees directing their own investments in a 401K plan typically tend to earn lower returns than state pension plans. NIRS attributes this to four factors: lower expenses, professional management, an optimal investment allocation used by the DB plan and the benefit of longevity risk pooling.

2) Rather than lower costs by moving from a DB to a 401K plan, states actually experience increased retirement costs for themselves and taxpayers. Thus, NIRS

says in its report, “Changing from DB to a 401K plan does not solve the underlying funding problems a state may be experiencing.”

Labor Unions Popularity On The Rise Again!

[A new Gallup Poll released this week](#) found that 61% of U.S. adults approve of labor unions, which is the highest its been since 2003. It’s uplifting news, especially since union popularity had experienced an all-time low of just 48% in 2009.

“Historically, unions have enjoyed strong support from the American public. In 1936, 72% of Americans approved of labor unions. Union approval peaked in the 1950s when it reached 75% in 1953 and 1957. Approval remained in the 60% range throughout the 2000s, right up to the election of Barack Obama as president. After plummeting in 2009, union approval remained lower than in its heyday but began climbing.”

If Searching For Child Care, Don’t Forget This Important Resource For State Employees

Longtime VSEA member, now retiree, Dave Clark has served on VSEA’s Child and Elder Care Committee for many years, and he recently asked *WIA* to remind state employees about an important child-care resource that is currently available to them.

“The Committee has noticed a recent decline in employees’ usage of the valuable child-care resources available to them, so we asked *WIA* to help us remind VSEA members about what is available,” explains Clark.

VSEA members can click [here](#) to learn more about the Committee’s “Child-Care Referral Service” and other child-care resources for state employees, including possible child-care reimbursement to qualifying employees.

Subscribe To VSEA Today!

VSEA’s Communications Department is happy to disseminate any and all communications the leadership, Chapters, Units, and others request, however, the lists the Department currently pull from are provided to the union by the State of Vermont. VSEA’s Communications Department has found the lists to be dated, incomplete and sometimes lacking key information that was entered by a VSEA staff person but later overwritten or deleted during a State data dump.

To help VSEA more effectively reach active members—and really all those members who want to know what’s going on in their union—VSEA will be working hard in the coming months to collect members’ emails on its own and begin to build contact lists that cannot be altered by a State download.

You can help us get started by visiting, VSEA.org/subscribe and signing up for the VSEA communications you are interested in receiving.

Thank you in advance for subscribing. Please urge your colleagues to do the same.

Quote Of The Week!

"It is gratifying to see that the popularity of unions has risen 13 points since 2009, particularly when wealthy, right-wing groups like ALEC and the State Policy Network are working every day to crush unions. The USW, the AFL-CIO and all of its member unions will continue working to end income inequality and improve the lives of all workers by ensuring they receive a fair share of the bounty created by their labor."

United Steelworkers of America President Leo Gerard in [an August 31 statement he issued](#) about a new Gallup Poll showing labor unions' popularity is on the rise.

Are Required Emergency Drills Happening Where You Work?

With the recent bomb threat at the State Office Building in St. Albans, VSEA wants to find out if the State of Vermont is following BGS emergency-situation protocol where you work.

The protocol on BGS' website reads:

"All owned and leased State Office Buildings occupied by State employees will practice a minimum of (1) evacuation fire drill every year and (1) Active Shooter and hostile intruder drill at least every two years. A record of these emergency drills should be recorded in the EML by the designated ECM on the day of the drill. The Safety Committees will coordinate drills with their respective sites. The Safety Committees shall meet within (14) days after the drills to discuss, critique, and analyze the drill."

VSEA wants to know if the proper training is occurring at your workplace and when it occurred last. Also, if you are unaware of this protocol, that's not good and VSEA wants to know this as well and also where you work.

Please send an email with your input to VSEA at vsea@vsea.org. Write "Protocol Status" in the subject line.

Threatened While On The Job? VSEA Wants To Know.

VSEA President Dave Bellini is asking all state employees who are threatened while performing your job duties to provide an account of the threat not only to your supervisor or the State, but also to VSEA.

"VSEA wants to begin to compile its own record of threats against frontline state employees, no matter your occupation," explains Bellini. "I'm asking all employees who are threatened, especially those working in AHS, to take a few minutes to fill out an online form VSEA made to collect your report. The information will help us provide a firsthand account of the number of threats being made and where they are being made, in addition to some other things."

If you are a state employee who is threatened on the job, please click [here](#) to find the online report form, **which will remain confidential**, unless otherwise approved by you.

Upcoming Meetings/Events/Holidays:

September 4

Labor Day Holiday

Most State Offices & VSEA Closed

September 4

Deadline To Vote In VSEA Officer Elections!

September 4

Deadline For NMU & Supervisory Members To Self-Nominate For Executive Committee!

September 4

Deadline To Submit Name For Retirement Board!

September 7

Board Of Trustees' Meeting

VSEA HQ

Montpelier

9:00 a.m.

September 8

Council Meeting

Stoweflake Resort

Stowe

9:00 a.m.

September 9

VSEA 73rd Annual Meeting

Stoweflake Resort

Stowe

9:00 a.m.