**WEEK IN ACTION!**

Weekly News From Your Union ~ April 14, 2014 – April 18, 2014

**VSEA Members Urged To Use Annual Leave To March On May 1 And Participate In Day Of Action**

*Workers’ Center Event To Feature VSEA Campaign To End Employee Retaliation*

VSEA is urging members to use a few hours of annual leave on May 1 to attend the Workers’ Center’s annual march through downtown Montpelier to the State House. The march is followed by a “Day of Action” to highlight issues and causes important to working Vermonters.

 The theme of this year’s event is “Health & Dignity” in honor of the Workers’ Center’s ongoing fights for healthcare and paid sick days for all, and, following the march, speakers will update the crowd on the status of the campaigns. In addition, speakers, including John Howe and possibly one or more VSEA members who have suffered retaliation at the workplace, will be educating the crowd about VSEA’s current campaign to end retaliation against employees, sharing their stories about what happened to them after they blew the whistle on waste, fraud and corruption in state government.

 “VSEA’s campaign to end retaliation against employees who speak out against waste in state government will be front and center at this year’s May Day event,” said VSEA President Shelley Martin. “It would be wonderful to see a strong show of VSEA support there for our members who will be at the microphone letting people know just how bad the retaliation can sometimes be. And the other issues being talked about, like health care and paid sick days, are very important too, so we need to be there to strongly support these campaigns and the workers who will be talking about why they are important to all Vermonters. I hope you can join us.”

 The May 1 March for Health & Dignity begins at noon, and those wanting to march are being asked to assemble on the State House lawn in advance. The event is family friendly and will include music, art, activities for the kids and fun!

**Busy Week For VSEA Whistleblower. Goes Back To Work & Testifies At State House**

 VSEA leader and whistleblower John Howe triumphantly returned to work on April 14, surrounded by a crowd of supporters that included VSEA, United Academics, Teamster and Workers’ Center members as well as Howe’s friends and family.

 Howe was placed on 30-day paid administrative leave on March 28, and his April 14 return comes two weeks in advance of his scheduled return date, primarily due to his activism. While Howe said he is happy to be returning to work, he is still upset that the State is refusing to drop its investigation of him, and he is vowing to not back down from his fight for justice until that happens. Howe is fighting back with VSEA against what he alleges are frivolous charges brought against him by management because of testimony he gave lawmakers in January 2014 against the State’s use of an expensive private contractor.

 One day after returning to work, Howe was back at it, using his lunch break to call in to WDEV’s “Equal Time” radio show to educate listeners about what happened to him but also to drum up support for whistleblower legislation to protect the identity of future whistleblowers. And on April 16, Howe used annual leave to come to the State House to testify to the Senate Government Operations about his and VSEA’s support for H. 863, the whistleblower bill. Following Howe’s testimony, the Committee voted 5-0 to move the bill forward to the Senate floor for a vote.

VSEA members are urged to stay engaged in Howe’s fight for justice. Here are some links to help you do so:

* To learn more about the fight, visit and like the “Justice for John” Facebook page by [clicking here](https://www.facebook.com/JusticeForJohnHowe?ref=hl);
* To view a short video of John’s return to work, [click here](https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?v=436732943137418&set=vb.433322390145140&type=2&theater);
* To listen to John’s April 16 testimony in support of H. 863, [click here](http://bit.ly/1l9h5jW); and
* To download a “We’re All John Howe” flyer, [click here](https://www.facebook.com/JusticeForJohnHowe/photos/a.433351896808856.1073741828.433322390145140/437139296430116/?type=1&theater).

**VLRB Issues ULP Complaint In Matt Gonyo Retaliation Case**
*Hearing Scheduled For June 17*

**Note: WIA readers will hopefully remember the recent story of another VSEA member who says he was retaliated against for his union activity. If you don’t, here’s an excerpt from a December 2013 VSEA press release:**

               *On December 13, fifteen-year Department of Liquor Control (DLC) investigator Matthew Gonyo will tell the Legislature’s Public Records Act Study Committee about his experience with retaliation after he and other DLC investigators reported an alleged abuse of overtime by a superior. Gonyo will testify that he was forced to endure two “time fraud” investigations leveled against him after he and the other DLC investigators filed a complaint with the Department of Human Resources about the superior’s use of overtime. Both investigations of Gonyo are still considered “open.”*

*“The retaliation was so bad that my name—and only my name—ended up in a Burlington Free Press story about 21 state employees being investigated for time fraud, in the wake of the Deeghan case,” explained VSEA member Gonyo in advance of his testimony. “How it got there, I do not know. I certainly didn’t give it to the press, and I’m sure Human Resources didn’t either. But somebody felt compelled to give my name to a reporter. I mean…I’m happy I was exonerated, but the damage to my reputation from that story had already been done. After my mother read the story on the day it was published, she called me in tears, wondering if I was going to be in trouble, or worse. The unwanted publicity and stress does take a toll on you and your family.”*

               Turns out the Vermont Labor Relations Board agrees that Gonyo has a valid complaint, issuing a finding on April 16 that reads:

               “Whereas, it appears to the Vermont Labor Relations Board that an unfair labor practice complaint should be issued and a hearing should be held to determine whether the State of Vermont committed unfair labor practices in violation of 3 V.S.A. § 961(1), (3) and (4). This case is scheduled for a hearing on June 17, 2014…”

*WIA* will keep you updated on Matt Gonyo’s fight.

**VSEA State Colleges’ Members Want Senate To Restore 2% Increase To System’s Funding**

All VSEA Members Being Asked To Contact Senators

            In 22 years, the State has not increased funding to the Vermont State Colleges (VSC) to keep up with inflation. This has resulted in the State Colleges experiencing a 76% drop in State appropriations from 1990 to 2013. For this reason, VSEA’s State Colleges’ members are joining with management to urge the Senate to include the State’s proposed 2% VSC funding increase in the new budget.

            “The State’s modest 2% increase proposal was cut to 1% by the House Appropriations Committee, and that isn’t even enough to cover this fiscal year’s 2% inflation rate,” explained VSEA Research Analyst Adam Norton. “So, if the increase remains at just 1%, the State Colleges’ are effectively having their budget cut. This means the budget gap will once again have to be made up through layoffs, benefit cuts or tuition increases. That hurts students and staff.”
            Norton says VSEA is asking its VSC members at Johnson State College and Lyndon State College especially to begin calling and emailing their senators, mainly because a couple hold key positions on the Senate’s Appropriations Committee.

            “VSC members, and, in fact, all VSEA members are urged to contact your senators today and ask them to restore the State’s proposed 2% increase to the Vermont State Colleges,” said Norton.

            Here are some talking points for when you call:

* Please restore the State’s proposed 2% increase for the State Colleges;
* Vermont ranks 47th in state appropriations for Higher Education, per 1,000 of personal income;
* Vermont State Colleges receive only 18% of their funding from the State; the national average for state colleges is 53%; and
* Vermont State Colleges are 82% dependent on tuition for funding and the national average is 47%.

Not sure who your senators are? [Click here to find out](http://www.leg.state.vt.us/legdir/FindMyMember.cfm).

**VSEA Files For Organizing Elections In Six State’s Attorneys’ Offices**

 Today, the Vermont State Employee Association (VSEA) filed majority petition cards with the Vermont Labor Relations Board in the latest iteration of a two-year struggle to win collective bargaining rights for all Vermont deputy state’s attorneys, victims’ advocates and administrative staff. The initial group of petitioning employees work at State’s Attorneys’ offices in Chittenden, Franklin, Essex, Orange, Rutland and Windsor counties.

 “If successful, 50 percent of this class of employees in Vermont will be represented by the VSEA, but these workers are not stopping there,” explained VSEA Executive Director Mark Mitchell. “VSEA is in the process of finalizing petitions in additional States Attorneys’ offices. Once that wraps up, VSEA will be working with worksite leaders to finalize majority petitions on behalf of as many as 60 to 70 percent of these workers.” Mitchell added that VSEA hopes elections in each of the first six offices will be held within four to six weeks.

 “Today, these workers have no right to have a voice in the determination of their working conditions, career progression or pay, but they are determined to continue their fight to obtain these rights,” said Mitchell. “State workers and their union look forward to welcoming these members into the VSEA family and working together towards a respectful first union contract.”

 In total, VSEA is seeking to organize 55 workers at the Chittenden, Franklin, Essex, Orange, Rutland and Windsor offices.”

The weekly *Seven Days* published an online story about the VSEA DSA drive on April 18. To read it, [click here](http://www.sevendaysvt.com/OffMessage/archives/2014/04/18/deputy-prosecutors-try-different-strategy-to-unionize).

**Report From The State House**

H. 882 - The Pay Act

The Senate Government Operations Committee voted 4-1 in favor of the Pay Act, which funds VSEA members’ collective bargaining agreement. The Pay Act is on the Senate’s notice calendar and will most likely go to the Senate Appropriations Committee next week.

S. 218 - An Act Relating to Temporary Workers

On Tuesday, S. 218 was heard in House Corrections and Institutions Committee where lawmakers took out a section of the bill pertaining to searching personal belongings of all people (including staff) entering State correctional facilities.

On Thursday, S. 218 was heard in the House Government Operations Committee. The Committee heard from the Court Administrator’s Office and VSEA on how the bill would apply to the Judiciary. The Committee is still deliberating the questions of whether or not to include the Judiciary Branch in the bill  and earned sick time for temps.

S. 225 - Dispatchers Early Retirement

The House Government Operations Committee took testimony on S. 225. The Committee heard testimony from the Commissioner of Human Resources, VSEA Legislative Director Steve Howard and Patricia Bennett, a 911 Dispatcher from Derby. S. 225 is currently a study of stressful jobs and the impact of an early retirement penalty removal. VSEA is advocating in favor of the section allowing dispatchers to retire early without a penalty. In addition, VSEA pushed for frontline workers to be added as participants in the study. The Committee will hear from the State Treasurer next week on this bill.

S. 241 - An Act Related to Binding Arbitration

S. 241 is now a study committee on grievance arbitration, and it’s tasked with examining traditional grievance arbitration versus the Vermont Labor Relations Board handling final step grievances. The House Committee on General Housing and Millitary Affairs took testimony from the Commissioner of Human Resources, Executive Director of the Vermont Labor Relations Board and the VSEA Legislative Director.

Budget H. 885

VSEA has reached an agreement with the Administration and Senator Sears to insert language into the budget regarding the Vermont Veteran's Home. The language includes a guarantee to our members of every other weekend off; language VSEA has actively pursued and refused to budge from. In addition, a classified employee will be elected by fellow Vets’ Home classified employees to serve on the Home's Board of Trustees.

H. 863 - An Act Relating to a Public Records Exemption of Whistleblowers

This bill was unanimously passed out of the Senate Government Operations Committee following compelling testimony by VSEA Board of Trustees’ member and whistleblower John Howe. The bill passed the Senate by voice vote on April 18 with no opposition.

**VSEA Needs To Know If Your Mailing Address Is Different Than Your Home Address**

 Many VSEA members have a mailing address that is different from their home address. They may keep a P.O. Box at the post office, or they may have a mailbox with an address different from their actual house address. If this is the case with you, please email the Union at nstein@vsea.org and let us know! Our reason is that the address information for our members that we receive from the State is unreliable. The State cannot report to us both a “Mailing Address” and a “Home Address.” We only occasionally send paper U.S. mail, but, when we do, it’s important, and includes: Ballots for Union elections, insurance information, and legally-required warnings of Union meetings.

 If your mailing address is different from your home address, we need you to tell us! Email nstein@vsea.org. Thanks!

**VSEA Schedules Information Sharing Meetings With DMV, Fish & Wildlife & Liquor Control Officers!**

 VSEA is hosting four meetings with DMV, Fish and Wildlife and Liquor Control Officers to discuss the goals and expectations of these workers and strategize about how to meet them.

 The goal of the meetings is to reconnect within VSEA to determine possible strategies that these workers may pursue to achieve certain improvements they may wish to see regarding their pay, benefits and working conditions.

Meeting Dates

April 23

Williston Barracks
277 St. George Rd
Williston, VT 05495

12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.

5:15 p.m. -6:30 p.m.

April 24

100 Mineral St.

Suite 309

Springfield, VT 05156

12:00 p.m. -1:00 p.m.

5:15 p.m. -6:00 p.m.

**Delta Dental Supplemental Coverage Enrollment Period Is Here!**

 Northeast Delta Dental Supplemental Program forms for the 2014 spring enrollment period are in the mail and VSEA members should be receiving them very soon.  If you already have coverage and would like to continue, then you don’t need to do anything.  For members who do not currently have supplemental coverage but would like to sign up, you will need to fill out and return the enrollment and payroll deduction form and return them to VSEA by May 16.  Again, all forms containing detailed instructions have been sent to members’ homes.
 VSEA members can find copies of all relevant 2014 Delta Dental supplemental dental plan forms by [clicking here](http://www.vsea.org/vsea-insurance)!

**VSEA Members Eligible For 2014 Vermont State Colleges Staff Federation Scholarship**

 A Vermont State Colleges’ Staff Federation scholarship is intended to help VSEA members and their spouses, dependents or domestic partners who are seeking financial assistance to pursue post-secondary educational goals at one of the following: Castleton State College, Lyndon State College, Johnson State College or Vermont Technical College. The deadline to apply is May 31, 2014.

VSCSF scholarship applications should be sent to:

Monique Prive, Librarian

c/o Lyndon State College

P.O. Box 919

Lyndonville, VT 05851‐0919

You can reach Monique by phone at 802‐626‐6364 or by e‐mail at monique.prive@lyndonstate.edu for the application or if you have any questions.

***Note: The VSCSF scholarship is not to be confused with the annual VSEA scholarship.***

**Barre Restaurant Joins VSEA Advantage Discount Program!**

The VSEA Advantage Discount Program is pleased this week to welcome the following Barre business:

**The Quarry Restaurant & Tavern**210 N. Main St.
Barre, VT 05641
Phone: 802-479-7002
E-mail: thequarry@myfairpoint.net
Contact: Joel Charpentier
*5% discount on meal. No discount on alcohol.*

**Old Labor Hall In Barre Hosting May Day “Primo Maggio” Celebration**

 The Barre Historical Society is hosting a Primo Maggio Day celebration on May 1 at the Old Labor Hall. An evening program called “Songs and Social Justice” has been planned, and it includes an Italian dinner, a screening of the film “The Internationale” and a sing-a-long tribute to folksinger and labor activist Pete Seeger, who passed away in January 2014.

 Here’s a schedule of events:

 5:30 p.m. – Lasagna Dinner (meat and vegetarian) and Cash Bar

 7:00 p.m. – Screening of “The Internationale”; an award-winning documentary about a musical anthem dubbed “the only song that could change the world.” It was actually sung regularly by the Italian stone cutters who built the Old Labor Hall in 1901 and who later began holding annual Primo Maggio Day celebrations there. Award-winning New York filmmaker Peter Miller is joining the celebration to introduce his film, and he will be available afterwards for a Q&A session.

 8:00 p.m. – Musical sing-a-long tribute to Pete Seeger, led by longtime local folk musicians Ben Koenig and Mark Greenberg (a.k.a. “Anything Goes”).

Tickets: $25 ($20 for union members, seniors & students) at the door, or purchase online at [www.oldlaborhall.com](http://www.oldlaborhall.com). For more information or reservations: 802-479-5600 or info@oldlaborhall.com

**Upcoming Meetings/Events/Holidays:**

**April 23**

Steward Training: The Contract & Building The Union
Room 1507
100 Main St.
Newport

9:00 a.m.

**April 25**

Special Events Committee Meeting

VSEA HQ
Montpelier

9:30 a.m.

**May 1**

May Day March

State House Lawn
Montpelier

March Begins @ 12:00 p.m.