



October 22, 2014

The Honorable Gov. Peter Shumlin

109 State Street, Pavillion

Montpelier, VT 05609

Dear Governor Shumlin:

Several days have passed since the end of the strike in South Burlington. It has given me time to reflect upon the statements made by you regarding the strike. Your statement regarding teachers strikes did not help the situation, and it left me wondering why you chose to make that statement in the midst of the strike when you could easily have said that the teachers were exercising their rights and it was inappropriate to speak on the issue at that time.

Our teachers were demoralized when they heard your words. They were striking as a last resort and truly wanted to continue to negotiate, but the school board was not willing to continue at that time. You may be supportive of the collective bargaining process, but it appeared otherwise to our teachers and the general public.

The negotiations process is complicated. Statements such as yours don't help, but they do make the news. You are well aware that Vermont-NEA has a resolution in support of binding interest arbitration from the 1990s. As you know, it is the school boards and their association that refuse to relinquish their ability to impose working conditions on teachers. If teachers do not want to accept a deterioration of their working conditions, under current law the only avenue left for them is to strike.

School boards have imposed in Vermont as many times as strikes have occurred, but they don't get the publicity. The result of impositions is a long-term decline in the quality of working conditions which impair the learning conditions of students. In a strike scenario, students make up the days missed and continue with their learning.

But for state employees, any group of unionized employees in Vermont has the right to strike. Our members are wondering why, when Vermont-NEA has recommended your reelection, we are still supporting you financially and otherwise. They are asking us if you really do respect the profession and our union. This has placed me in a very awkward position and I would like to discuss with you how we might move forward.

We have a long history of working with you on labor issues, binding interest arbitration in lieu of imposition and strikes being just one of many. But your comments last week are what the South Burlington teachers and the other members of Vermont-NEA are focused on at the moment.

I would like to meet with you before Election Day so that we may straighten out what I truly hope is a misunderstanding. Is there a way for you to respond to our members' concerns and frustrations? Right now, I am faced with disillusioned union members who could use support from their Governor.

Please understand that this is a very serious issue and it must be addressed. I look forward to hearing from you, soon.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Martha Allen".

Martha Allen

President, Vermont-NEA