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Justin Johnson, Secretary

MEMORANDUM

TO: Agency and Department Heads

FROM: Justin Johnson, Secretary of Administration 

RE: Secretary of Administration Hiring Approval Requirement

DATE: February 10, 2015

As you are aware the Governor's proposed FY '16 budget contains the requirement that we find \$5 million in General Fund personnel cost savings. The budget proposes that agencies and departments find approximately \$4.8 million in their budgets to cover Pay Act. In addition, the recent downgrade in revenues for FY '16 requires we close a further gap of \$18.6 million.

While these budget numbers are a challenge, they are achievable – and we will do our part to ensure that state government continues to be effective in delivering services to Vermonters in the most efficient manner possible. Success will involve us working closely with staff and each other to identify savings.

Given this, while leaving a state building last week, I was both surprised and disappointed to be approached to sign a VSEA 'Fight Back' petition that calls for no cuts in state government spending. The petition indicated that the union will not deal with the administration on labor savings.

The Agency of Administration, through DHR, has reached out to VSEA to set up a meeting to discuss how we can move forward together. However, we are concerned that the union is saying "No" before we have even have an opportunity to talk. This approach leaves me very concerned that the administration won't have an opportunity to take steps, in conjunction with the union, to help minimize any jobs losses while meeting a balanced budget.

For this reason **I am implementing an immediate requirement for my office's approval to fill any vacant positions.** Any request to fill or recruit for a position will need to be accompanied by a justification explaining how the position fits into department or agency priorities, is critical to the work of the organization, and why it would likely not be a part of any programmatic or staffing cuts going forward if that is where we end up. The requirement applies to all positions across the executive branch – no exceptions.

Requests for hiring approval should be sent through DHR Commissioner Maribeth Spellman, who will coordinate with my office to apply for the approval to move forward. This requirement will apply to any position that is not in active recruitment as of today. Positions that are in active recruitment can proceed as planned.

I take my obligation to ensure good governance seriously, and I am as equally committed to protecting the valuable services that state government provides to Vermonters as I am to the great staff that do that work. We can and must work together to provide efficient and effective service to Vermont taxpayers. I am ready to work with anyone who wants to make that happen, but I do not believe that “No” is a constructive, helpful, or appropriate response. I hope all agency and department leaders, and our employee union, will agree with me on that. I believe the actions I’ve outlined here will help us have maximum flexibility to work out the best way to ensure we meet our budget targets as well as continue to provide important services.

Thank you for your understanding and cooperation as we move forward.