

## Memorandum

**TO: Major & Minor Political Party State Chairs and Executive Directors**

**FROM: Deborah L. Markowitz, Secretary of State**

**RE: Biennial Organization of Political Parties**

**DATE: June 8, 2005**

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State law requires all political parties to organize or reorganize every two years beginning in September of odd-numbered years. The reorganization must be completed before January 1 of the following year (filings must be completed by December 31, 2005). The chair of your state committee starts the process by setting a date between September 10 and 30 for town chairs to call town caucuses. Historically, the major parties have communicated and picked the same date for caucuses, but the law does not require this.

Whatever date your party selects, please make sure that you have your mailing out to your party chairs and interested persons in time for them to complete the necessary postings (and newspaper advertising for towns with population over 1,000).

The state chair must also set a date not more than 30 days after the town caucuses for the county chairs to hold county committee meetings. If you are forming a new party, or organizing in a town for the first time, then any three voters in the town may call a town caucus. Some parties have by-laws that provide only for town committees and a state committee (eliminating county committees.) This is permissible.

Prior to 2001, our office sent reorganization materials directly to all town and county chairs that had previously filed certifications with us. However, several parties also mailed out their own forms, causing confusion among town party chairs receiving multiple mailings from the party and from our office. Since 2001, we have only sent the reference materials, forms, and sample notice to the State Party Chairs and Executive Directors. **IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PARTY to copy the forms or create your own forms and mail them to your town party chairs or interested persons in sufficient time to meet the deadlines.**

If you compose your own forms, please make sure that you include all of the required information AND that the forms include **spaces for the completed forms to be certified and signed by the chair and secretary of each committee.**

The Guide to Political Party Organization in Vermont provides an overview of the steps that must be taken by each party to reorganize. We have also included a summary of the statutory duties for town, county and state chairs. If a town does not have a town chair, or if the chair does not call a caucus, any three voters of the town may call a caucus. (17 V.S.A. §§2303, 2306). We have also included a "Sample Notice of the Meeting" that can be copied and used for posting of notices.

Our office has also posted information pertinent to party organization and reorganization on our website ([www.sec.state.vt.us](http://www.sec.state.vt.us)). This includes blank copies of the forms, this memo and Guide to Political Party Organization. We have also uploaded image files of the certificates that were filed in 2003 for informational purposes. Please direct party members who are looking for contact information to the website, if possible.

In 2005, if the Democratic, Republican, Progressive and Liberty Union parties organize in at least 15 towns, these political parties will have Major Party status for the 2006 elections. All other political parties that organize in at least 10 towns will have Minor Party status. (A political party must have obtained at least 5% of the votes cast in a statewide officer election in 2004 in order to reorganize as a major party in 2005.)

**In your cover memo to Town Chairs and interested persons, please include the following "checklist" of the requirements of Vermont law for town committee organization:**

**Within three (3) days of your caucus**, the Town party committee must file the following with the Office of the Secretary of State and the officials listed on the bottom of the form:

- **A completed Certification of Officers of Town Committee form signed by the town chair and secretary.** Please note that you must elect all five officers. (17 V.S.A. §2314)  
The minimum number of voters to form a committee is three. A legal voter of the town may serve in more than one office, but the *same person CANNOT serve as chair and vice-chair, or as treasurer and assistant treasurer.*
- The **Certification of Officers form must** include the names and addresses of the five officers and **must be signed by BOTH the Chairman and Secretary.** (17 V.S.A. §2307)
- **A copy of the "NOTICE calling the meeting" must** be filed along with the certification of officers. (17 V.S.A. §§2307, 2311, and 2313). This can be a photocopy of the notice that you posted in the town clerk's office and at least one other public place in town, a photocopy of your newspaper advertisement, or a clip of the actual advertisement. **IN 2003, THIS WAS THE MOST COMMON OVERSIGHT IN FILING PAPERWORK WITH OUR OFFICE.**

In your cover memo also include instructions explaining how your party wants them to complete the organization process, including the names and telephone numbers of the appropriate persons within your party for town chairs or interested persons to contact to ask questions about your party reorganization.

After your party has completed its reorganization, our office will send a letter to the party state chair certifying that organization has been completed. You **MUST** send our office a copy of your updated bylaws at that time.

If you have any questions, please call Kathy DeWolfe, Director of Campaign Finance and Elections at 828-2304, or 1-800-439-8683.

Enclosures: Certification of Officers and Delegates forms (Town, County and State)  
Guide to Political Party Organization in Vermont  
Statutory Duties of Town, County and State Political Party Chairs  
Chapter 45 of Vermont Statutes Annotated  
Sample Notice of the Calling of the Meeting