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To:	DOF-ALL EMPLOYEES
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Hello everyone,

New information about uniforms in the Branch this week, make sure you check it out. Thanks to the members of the uniform committee and to Mary Weaver for making this happen.

As I mentioned last week, the new year is off to a fast start. The General Assembly is getting ramped up and celebrating many firsts for our 400-year-old legislative body. They are facing a significant increase in the amount of proposed legislation and everyone will be stretched this year to keep up. Fortunately things are quiet on the forestry front so far and hopefully we will be able to keep focused on our budget amendments throughout the session. John Colligan and I attended the Agency Heads Legislative Briefing last week where the administration spells out their expectations for the session. Mostly it boils down to – be honest, be prepared, and stick to the administration position on legislation and the budget. It is the same message every year but it is a good reminder that we all work for the Commonwealth and the Governor is our elected leader.

This is a good time to remind everyone at VDOF that we all need to be very careful to avoid expressing any political position in a way that could be associated with our work for the state. There are a lot of hot-button issues being debated this year and emotions among supporters and opponents are running high. In the course of your work people may want to talk to you about what they are hearing about the General Assembly and the administration. Remember that we all have access to an unlimited amount of information these days, unfortunately much of it is false or misleading and some of it is intentionally so. Be careful not to spread any information that you do not know to be factual. This is a good time to keep your conversations focused on the good work that we do and all the benefits of forests and forestry.

Speaking of the great work that you all do, while I was at the agency heads meeting, Secretary Ring introduced me to a member of the Governor's policy team whose family owns land in Shenandoah County. He and his family had recently met with Matt Wolanski and Justin Barnes to go over their property and Matt and Justin made quite an impression. He said that his family couldn't stop talking about how knowledgeable they were and how excited the family was to hear all that they shared with them.

And on Thursday night Ed Zimmer and I attended the Agribusiness Council Legislative Banquet and we sat with Doug Phillips of Phillips and Turman Tree Farm. Mr. Phillips wanted me know how impressed he was with Justin Funk and said that he was glad that he had relocated down to their area.

Thanks ya'll for the great work you are doing. Your work with individuals and families and the relationships that you build generates support across the state for what we do and for what we need.

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