

From: Coriell, Scott [Scott.Coriell@state.vt.us]
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Gov. Shumlin Appoints New Administration and Human Services Secretaries

MONTPELIER, Vt. – Gov. Peter Shumlin made two key staff announcements today, appointing new secretaries to the agencies of Administration and Human Services.

Justin Johnson, who currently serves as Deputy Secretary at the Agency of Natural Resources, will take over as Secretary of Administration. He will replace Jeb Spaulding who has served in that position since Gov. Shumlin first took office in 2011 and will become the next Chancellor of the Vermont State Colleges in January. Johnson's appointment will take effect at the beginning of the year, though he is expected to begin the transition immediately.

Gov. Shumlin also thanked Interim Secretary of Human Services Harry Chen for helping to guide the agency for the past several months, and announced that Dr. Chen will return to his position as Commissioner of the Department of Health at the end of the year. The Governor announced that Hal Cohen, who has served as the Director of Capstone Community Action for nearly two decades, will be appointed Secretary of Human Services. Cohen's appointment will take effect in early January.

"Jeb and Harry have been with me since the beginning, and I'm incredibly grateful to them for their dedication to this state and its people," the Governor said. "Through their many collective years of public service, they have both made Vermont a better state in so many ways."

"Jeb leaves big shoes to fill, but I am confident that Justin is the right person for the job. His service to the state during three different administrations has given him all the skills needed to excel in this role. He knows how to get things done, as an honest broker with a history of bipartisanship and incredibly sound judgment," Gov. Shumlin said.

"I'm honored to welcome Hal Cohen to the team. He has led a successful human services organization for many years, seeing up close how state programs for our most vulnerable work," Gov. Shumlin said. "As someone who understands how the Agency of Human Services functions from the customer's point of view, Hal will bring a new perspective to this job that will benefit the Agency and the Vermonters it serves. He is an extremely competent manager with tremendous compassion for those who are struggling. He is a perfect fit for this challenging and critical role."

Justin Johnson:

“I am both honored and humbled by the opportunity to take on this role in the administration. There are a number of challenges ahead of us, but working together we can build on Vermont’s strengths and make this state even greater.”

Justin Johnson was appointed Deputy Secretary of Natural Resources in January 2013. Prior to this Johnson had served as both Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation since December 2006. He began in state government at the (then) Department of Agriculture as a marketing specialist. He brings with him eighteen years of experience in public management and policy development at the federal, state and local level in both Australia and the USA.

Johnson was a senior executive in a large municipal government in Australia, Mornington Peninsula Shire, serving 140,000 year-round residents and almost 2 million tourists each year. He also spent three years as Chief-of-Staff to a member of the Australian House of Representatives, overseeing constituent services, policy development, research, and staffing.

Johnson also represents Vermont on the board of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative and is Vermont’s representative to the Environmental Council of the States.

In his spare time he served four years as President of the White River Partnership, and four years on the board of Washington County Farm Bureau. He currently serves as the Chair of the Finance Committee for the City of Barre. He holds a BA (Journalism) from Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), Melbourne, Victoria, Australia; he is also a graduate of the Vermont Public Managers Program and the Agency of Natural Resources Leadership and Management Program. Married with three children, Johnson lives Barre, VT.

Hal Cohen:

“As the director of Capstone Community Action, I have had the opportunity to work closely with AHS staff and their departments. They are a dedicated and committed team. I look forward to working with them to improve the health and wellbeing of all Vermonters and to work together to protect our most vulnerable citizens.”

For over 18 years Hal Cohen has been the Executive Director of Capstone Community Action (formerly known as Central Vermont Community Action Council) which employs over 180 people. Headquartered in Barre, Vermont, Capstone serves over 18,000 people a year from numerous sites in Washington, Lamoille and Orange counties covering over 2,000 square miles in largely rural communities.

Hal’s professional and civic involvement has included sitting on a number of local and state boards such as the Vermont Council on Rural Development, the Central Vermont Workforce Investment Board, the Vermont Workforce Development Council, Food Works, EarthWalk Vermont, Central Vermont Hunger Taskforce, the Vermont Low Income Trust for Electricity and CAPLAW.

Hal has an M.A. in counseling psychology from Antioch New England Graduate School and an M.S. in nonprofit management from the New School for Social Research. Hal and his wife, Shelley, raised three children in Montpelier and now reside in Middlesex, Vermont.

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