



UPDATE

American Federation of Teachers Local 604, AFL-CIO

www.aftlocal604.org

October / November 2020

Vote YES for the Fair Tax Amendment

By Dan Mercer, IFT Field Service Director

You might be wondering why our union is behind the Fair Tax Amendment on this year’s ballot. Much disinformation fills the airways and social media, attempting to discourage voters from supporting this measure. Billionaire, Ken Griffin, dumped \$46.7 million into the fight against the Fair Tax—his motives are clear. As the wealthiest person in the state, he will pay more in taxes if the amendment passes.

So what is this thing we’re calling the “Fair Tax” and why do we call it that? Currently, Illinois is one of only 4 states with a constitutionally mandated flat income tax structure, meaning everyone in the state is taxed at the same rate, regardless of income. Thirty-three other states and the Federal Government have a progressive income tax allowing them to tax lower income-earners at lower rates and higher ones at higher rates. Why is that “fairer” than a flat tax?

When you consider the total tax burden on a household, income tax is only one piece of the picture. If you include the sum of state and local taxes on purchases, property, etc., the lowest 20% of Illinois’ income earners currently pay over 14% of their income in taxes, while the top 1% pay just over 7%. With our poorest workers paying twice as much of their income as our wealthiest citizens, Illinois has the 8th most regressive tax system in the United States. When compared to other states in the Midwest, our lower income-earners currently pay the highest percentage of their income in taxes. To address this inequity, the Fair Tax will **reduce** the tax burden on workers with lower incomes, while asking those who can afford it to pay more.

Maybe you aren’t sure how the Fair Tax will impact you. The rate structure for the Fair Tax has already been passed, making it possible for to find out how you will be affected. If your adjusted gross income is up to \$250,000 per year, you will pay the same or **less** than you do under the flat tax. This is true for 97% of Illinoisans. For those who earn more than a quarter-million dollars, rates will increase marginally on their income above that amount. That means they’ll pay a lower rate on their first \$250,000 in earnings and only the income they earn above that amount will be taxed at a higher rate, up to \$750,000 for individuals and \$1,000,000 for married couples. Once you reach those levels of income, your total earnings are taxed at the high-est rate. To see how your state income tax would change under

the Fair Tax, check out the calculator at www2.illinois.gov/sites/gov/fairtax.

The Fair Tax will generate approximately \$3.4 billion in additional revenue each year. The current flat tax has contributed to a structural deficit and accumulating debt which was exacerbated by the budget crises under former governor, Bruce Rauner. Prior to the pandemic, our state was increasing funding to education through Evidence Based Funding, paying down its backlog of bills, including obligations to the pension systems, all while increasing its credit rating. The economic strain created by the coronavirus has made it more important than ever to support the Fair Tax. The additional revenue will help the state continue to make good on its responsibilities to fund education, provide essential services and pay its bills. Without that revenue, we’re faced with two difficult alternatives—raise taxes on all income earners by as much as 20% or make devastating cuts to education, public safety and essential services affecting our most vulnerable citizens. While some call for additional cuts, according to the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability, Illinois has already reduced spending on services by \$400 million this year compared to 2009 and by 23% over the past two decades (www.ctbaonline.org).

Those who oppose the Fair Tax are spreading numerous falsehoods about the amendment. They say it gives the legislature the power to raise our taxes. This is how tax rates already work—they are set by the legislature. In fact, states with a Fair Tax are historically less likely to raise taxes on lower- and middle-income citizens than those with a flat tax. Some are worried that the Fair Tax applies to their retirement income. That is simply not true. Illinois does not tax retirement income and the Fair Tax includes nothing to change that. Others have expressed the concern that voting for an amendment opens up the state’s constitution to other changes. This is also false. For example, in 2016 Illinois voters passed what is known as the “Lockbox Amendment” which requires the state to use money raised via transportation taxes to be used only for transportation purposes, such as building and maintaining roads and bridges.

Continued on pg. 6

2 We’re under attack
by Bill Briggs

3 The Notorious RGB
by Bill Briggs

4 Lawsuits and the internet
by attorney James Ridge

We're under attack

Public education suffering
for a reason



Bill Briggs

I do not know of one person who entered education with politics as a main concern. We did so for a myriad of reasons: select one or more. For me, it happened around the sixth grade. I knew I wanted to teach, but I was uncertain of the area, history or business, but never English. Then, at Huntington High School, I found a home on the school newspaper staff. That set the direction. I would teach business and advise student publications. Reality set in at Indiana State University. My academic advisor told me I would have few options for employment with that co-major. I needed to major in English Education and Journalism.

Dr. Stoffel, sorry I can't remember his first name 52 years later, changed my life. It wasn't because he was from my hometown, taking care of the son from a family that attended the same church he did as he grew up. He was doing his job to set a confused student in the right direction.

Many believe the attacks on public school educators started when President Trump appointed Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education. Remember, she had no experience with public education, sent her children to private schools, and set out to shift funds from public schools to private ones. We all know that teaching in any situation is difficult, but we have an additional requirement in public education that the others do not. We must educate everyone who enters the building, period.

In reality, the attacks started before that. What quickly comes to mind are our pensions. Repeatedly, *The Chicago Tribune* blames anyone who has a state pension, like the Teachers Retirement System or University Retirement System, on why the state is in the financial shape we are. Recently, on its editorial page, the question was raised on why if we are going to vote on the Fair Tax amendment, why aren't the citizens also allowed to vote on our pensions. Imagine what that result could be. Many voters do not want us to have something they do not receive.

More recently, there were cries that as we moved to remote learning because of the Covid-19 virus, why not hold educators accountable for student growth? Some even questioned if we really cared about students since we were questioning how safe it would be for students and staff, alike, to return to the buildings this Fall. For some, the underlying reason was, in my opinion, sports. We have seen rallies all over the state to start playing football and volleyball, to name two, now. Why, because other states are doing so. And remember, the Big Ten Conference just reinstated football, starting in late October, to please, possibly the alumni.

When then Governor Rauner went after public education, especially higher education, Springfield stepped in to put a halt to this destruction. In August of 2017, he vetoed a bill to strip millions of dollars for CPS from a school-funding overhaul; that veto could have cost money to downstate districts, too. At one point, he had to apologize for a 2011 email which he asserted half of CPS teachers "are virtually illiterate." He also defended his tax credit to fund private school scholarships.

One thing is clear, though, property values, basically, have one consistency anywhere in the state, or the country. It is the quality of the public education. Parents select where they want to live, if they have a choice, because of the rating of the schools. It's hard to admit, but it is factual. As educators, we know quality comes in all forms, and students who live in economically challenged areas can develop into leaders, too. But maybe their K-12 years were not filled with all the niceties of more affluent areas.

By now, you are wondering where I am heading with this. Our country has thrived because of checks and balances. This concept has never been stronger than it is concerning public education. By numbers, educators in Illinois are over 200,000, and yes, the IFT and IEA have strong voices. But in reality, who gets things done for us in Springfield? The Democrats.

When members ask why we tend to support Democrats, the response is easy, but often not heard or comprehended. The powers that be, whether it's the IFT or AFT Local 604, look at the voting records of candidates in relation to educational issues. Do they support the same values to protect or improve public education as those of us in the classroom?

Do we agree all of the time? No, but we know that they will fight for us to have a seat at the table to be heard. I know this column will rattle our GOP-leaning members, and I will receive a note or two asking why don't we just change our name to the Democratic AFT Local 604. But tell me one thing Betsy DeVos, Bruce Rauner, or the GOP caucus have initiated to help public education, waiting, waiting, waiting!

In this day of Covid-19 with no vaccine available, the stress in the classroom grows. Parents are screaming for complete in-person education, and educators want to do what is right for all. The attacks will continue, that we know. But one thing is for certain. We are in a better place than we would be because of one party, The Democrats.

The Notorious RBG, *a woman to be respected*

By Bill Briggs, AFT Local 604 president

Since her death on Friday, Sept. 19, much has been said and written about Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the petite second female Supreme Court Justice, but one thing is for sure, it will be a long time before another has as much impact as she.



In a year filled with the stress of Covid-19 and the presidential election, one thing we did not need was this. Hope vs Fear and Hate was already the center of the campaign, but now another wrench was thrown in to widen the wedge that already separated Democrats and Republicans.

At 87 and in failing health, the announcement was not a surprise, but it was. Liberals had hoped that she would be able to fulfill her desire to continue to serve on the Court until she reached 90, at least. In doing so, the next president would name her successor.

After all, we can all remember what happened in February of 2016 when Antonin Scalia died, unexpectedly. Naturally, then President Barack Obama was within his constitutional right to name a replacement, and he did, Merrick Garland. After all, the election was 270 days away.

But Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell had other ideas and declared any appointment by a sitting president to be null and void. His reasoning, the next president should choose Scalia's replacement.

Fast forward over four years later and only 47 days before the election. McConnell has a change of heart and said it was not only President Trump's duty to nominate a replacement, but that it was possible that if he had the votes, McConnell would push this through before Nov. 3 even though the average length of this process was roughly 70 days.

Such hypocrites, he and his party. In support, Lindsey Graham (R-SC), Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, professed in 2016 that it was unacceptable, during an election year, to confirm a nomination to the Supreme Court. After the Republicans refused to grant even a hearing for Garland, Lindsey said, "I want you to use my words against me. If there's a Republican president in 2016 and a vacancy occurs in the last year of his first term, you can say Lindsey Graham said let's let the next president, whoever it might be, make that nomination." He reinforced this idea in 2018 when he said, "If an opening comes in the last year of President Trump's term, and the primary process has started, we'll wait to the next election."

With the strong possibility of the Democrats taking back control of both the White House and the Senate, the GOP's true colors are flying. What is legal and what is right seems to battle each other.

During the final days of her life, Ginsburg was asked by her granddaughter if there was anything she wanted to say. Her response was clear, "My most fervent wish is that I will not be replaced until a new president is installed."

Would her wishes be honored? Not with Trump still in the White House. Look at what his reaction was. He told Fox News that Democratic politicians are the ones who really wrote her statement. Yes, that is the man who on the day after RBG's death at a political rally in North Carolina, smiled back at his audience when they started to chant "Fill that Seat." Did he stop them; no, he encouraged them to continue.

All of this is so hard to comprehend. What happened to the day when the president was a role model, respected as the leader of the Free World? Will we ever return to civility? Will Democrats and Republicans ever stop battling each other and put the country first?

Yes, it can happen. And we can use Ruth and Antonin as role models. Their friendship was unique, to say the least. Although they were both New Yorkers and close in age, she was Jewish and he Catholic and Italian American. Their political views did not match, and often neither did their opinions on the Court. She was a leading advocate for women's rights, and he once said in 2010 that corporate political spending is protected free speech.

Ruth had faced many uphill struggles in her career. Graduating first in her law class at Columbia, she struggled to find a job. She said she had three strikes against her. She was Jewish, a woman, and a mother of a young child. After being nominated by President Bill Clinton to be the second woman on the Supreme Court, she was asked how many women out of nine would be enough. "My answer is when there are nine."

Yet, they were able to leave work at work and enjoy a friendship, the envy of many. They had a tradition of spending New Year's Eve together with their families, and they shared a love of Opera. It was almost like Mutt n Jeff, but it worked until the end.

Yes, Ruth and Antonin can give us hope for a better America, one without the hate and fear, but one of understanding, cooperation, and love.



Your rights under the workers' compensation act

By James M. Ridge, attorney at law

Lawsuits and the Internet

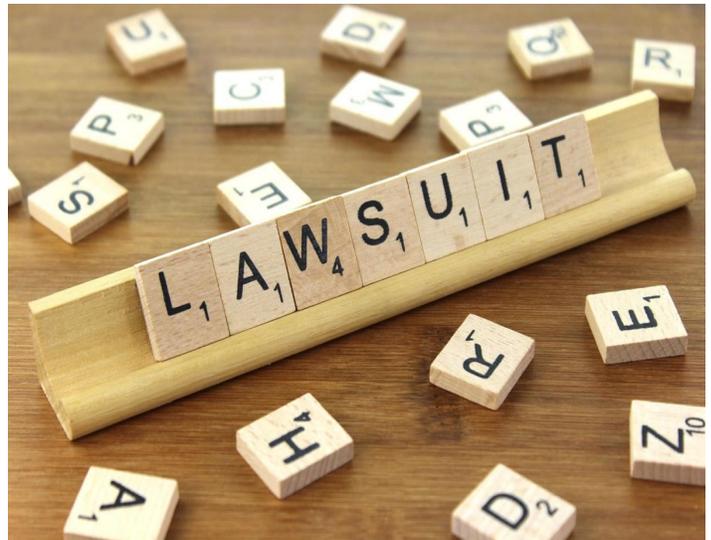
Injury victims must never forget that there is an entire industry of attorneys and insurance company claims department employees devoted to weeding out fraudulent claims. The way they accomplish that is by vigorously defending each and every claim and lawsuit as if it was fraudulent.

One current method being pursued is through statements injured parties make on the internet, whether in email messages, blogs, or posts on social media forums such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. For example, during litigation, one specific insurance defense firm generally requests: "Any and all social media or other electronic postings, blogs, conversations, photographs, tweets, feeds, comments, or websites authored by or concerning the plaintiff for the one year prior to the accident through the present date."

So how do you protect yourself from this intrusion into your privacy?

- Don't use social media while your case is pending.
- If you must use social media, don't discuss your injury, your lawsuit, and definitely don't discuss how your injury happened.
- Also, be mindful that your comments and photographs may contradict your claims in the suit, i.e. vacation photos when you're claiming loss of a normal life.
- Don't accept friend requests / invitations to connect from anyone you don't know.
- Set your privacy settings to only allow your family and friends to see your postings, and not defense attorneys or insurance claims professionals.

What if it's too late and you've already posted before you've consulted with an attorney? Unfortunately, you're stuck. If you delete the content you've posted, the court considers this destruction of evidence. Courts don't treat destruction of evidence kindly. Remember, everything can be intentionally mis-construed if someone really wants to. You may have been sedated on pain killers for the entire miserable one-hour bumpy car ride to the Indiana Dunes and your therapist may have even recommended aquatic therapy, but when you're at trial, you don't want a defense attorney showing the jury pictures of you holding a piña colada on the beach moments after your attorney asks them to award you hundreds of thousands of dollars or more for your suffering.



For more information on your rights contact:

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COVID-19 and what Union Members need to be aware of...

By Adam Harding, IFT Field Service Director

“All public and nonpublic schools must follow IDPH and ISBE guidance during Phase 4 and take proactive measures to ensure the safety of students, staff, and visitors, including, but not limited to the following public health guidelines...”

That order came directly from the Governor in his Executive Order released on July 24th. Following that statement, the order drills down to specifics that must be followed and adhered to for schools to re-open.

There are 5 areas that must be followed and ISBE and IDPH have issued multiple guidance documents for school districts to consider and be compliant:

a. Limiting the number of people in one space to fifty or fewer.

b. Ensuring compliance with social distancing requirements to the greatest extent possible. For purposes of this Executive Order, social distancing includes maintaining at least six-foot distance from other individuals and discouraging physical contact between individuals.

c. Requiring symptom screenings and temperature checks or requiring individuals to self certify that they are free of COVID-19 symptoms before entering school buildings.

d. Ensuring appropriate hygienic practices, including washing hands with soap and water for at least twenty seconds as frequently as possible or using hand sanitizer, covering coughs or sneezes (into the sleeve or elbow, not hands), discouraging the sharing of personal items, and regularly cleaning and disinfecting high-touch surfaces.

e. Requiring the use of appropriate personal protective equipment by students, staff, and visitors, including the use of face coverings by individuals who are over age two and able to medically tolerate a face covering. Schools must provide face coverings to all employees who are not able to maintain a minimum six-foot social distance at all times and, to the extent possible, make face coverings available for all students.

In reflecting on where we have been and where we need to go, the Local wanted to share some specific reminders.

Self-Certification/ Disclosures

Part of the Governor’s Executive Order requires symptom screenings and temperature checks or requiring individuals to self-certify that they are free of COVID-19 symptoms before entering school buildings. In working with our councils, we are aware that there are many vari-

ations of this. It is important that you understand what is expected of you locally with regards to experiencing COVID-19 symptoms and disclosing to your employer. It is also imperative to understand that falsifying information on a self-certification or not disclosing symptoms is insubordination and can be an offense that may result in disciplinary measures including termination.

Reopening/ Transition Plans

Each public school is required to have a reopening/ transition plan that is available to the public by being posted on the district’s website. The Local encourages every member to have read through the plans, that have hopefully been developed with cooperation of the council. Within the plans, there may be many expectations of you as an employee that you need to be familiar with.

Board/ Employer Policies

Each Board of Education or Trustees has been advised to update their Board Policies with respect to COVID-19. As a public employee it is a professional responsibility that you are aware of all policies of the employer that governs your work. Some of the policy updates that we have seen as a response to COVID are specific to mask/ face-coverings, health screenings, learning options, etc.

The Local is encouraging members to be aware of COVID policies that may have been updated or passed by your employer. All Board policies need to be public and can easily found on the employer’s website, however it is important to know that there may be employee expectations/ policies that are not public. These expectations may have been shared at an institute day, emailed to you from the boss or even shared at the building level. If you are unsure of the expectations of you with respect to COVID, it is imperative that you reach out to the leadership within your council.

As you can see there is a lot of information that is new and ever-changing. AFT Local 604 has links to COVID resources which can be found on the Resource page of our website: <https://www.aftlocal604.org/resources>

As always, if you have any COVID-related questions, reach out to your council leadership and/ or your Field Service Director.



That amendment did not open up the entire constitution and neither does the Fair Tax Amendment. Finally, it's been rumored that the Fair Tax increases property taxes. This is also completely false. Actually, passing the Fair Tax will enable the state to continue increasing its funding of education, which is currently over-reliant on property taxes, therefore providing potential property tax relief.

The Fair Tax Amendment provides us with a means to generate the revenue needed to better fund education, maintain essential services, and put our state on a path to financial stability without placing an increased burden on those who can least afford it. That's why the IFT and Local 604 strongly endorse this measure. We urge you to vote YES.

VOTE YES
FOR FAIRNESS

and

97% of **ILLINOIS EARNERS**
*** will receive ***

TAX RELIEF

CALCULATE YOUR TAX RELIEF AT [ILLINOIS.GOV/FAIRTAXCALCULATOR](https://illinois.gov/fairtaxcalculator)

Tackle Student Debt

All classes are online—No traveling!

Let IFT Field Services assist you in reducing the burden of your student loan(s). Members will be given information on Income Driven Repayment Plans, Public Service Loan Forgiveness, the new Temporary Expanded Public Service Loan Forgiveness, and how the CARES Act and current economy affect your repayment.

This clinic is for IFT-AFT card-signed members only.

If you decide to attend this virtual clinic, please be aware of the type of student loan(s) you currently have, the name of your loan servicer(s), and your student loan payment history. Please have your FAFSA account and student loan servicer portal page printed or available for personal reference during the presentation.

Classes will be limited to 15 participants. Choose one of the following dates:

October 13th from 4:30-7:00 PM
October 20th from 4:30-7:00 PM

Sign up today to reserve your spot! Email Tyler Kirk at tkirk@ift-aft.org

Senator Bertino-Tarrant ending Springfield career

Editor's Note: State Senator Jennifer Bertino-Tarrant will not be returning to her Springfield office after the November election. Instead, she is running for Will County Board chairperson. The former Will County Schools Superintendent has been a strong voice for public education in her two terms and has served as chair of the Education Committee. Following below is her brief assessment of how the pandemic has affected education in the last six months.



Remote learning has reshaped education. First and foremost, thank you to all our educators. The last several months have not been easy and our administrators, teachers, and support staff have been rock stars! Forced to be teachers, parents, and caregivers, you have demonstrated your commitment to our children, and I could not be prouder to be part of this professional community. Your hard-work does not go unnoticed.

No doubt, concerns with in-person teaching will continue and remote learning may continue; therefore, the need to address the digital divide will be imperative in order to ensure equitable learning for all our students. This includes both internet access and hardware for our students. Teaching during COVID has left more questions than answers, and items such as assessments, teacher evaluation, preparation, and professional development will continue to be addressed. In addition, we can not ignore the families and students who do not have the means to balance it all and, in turn, have left many students to fall through the cracks.

Recently, an education committee meeting was held addressing the Black Caucus' Education Pillar to focus on systematic racism. Early Education funding is a priority. Groups have been in discussion to mirror the Evidence Based Funding Model to create a funding source for our early learners. As educators, we recognize the disparities in our communities and fully understand the need to support our youngest learners. In addition, more diverse hiring practices was part of the initial discussion. There will be multiple committee hearings planned addressing topics including compulsory school age, inclusive environment, defining student success, graduation requirements, mental health, and Black History.

Like most years, there will be a full agenda planned around our preK-12 schools. I encourage you to participate in the legislative process.



Now more than ever, we need a Fair Tax. Please vote YES for fairness on November 3.

A Fair Tax would:

- › Make the wealthy pay their fair share
- › Ensure 97 percent of Illinoisans see their taxes cut or remain the same – only earners making \$250,000 or more per year would pay more
- › Lift the burden off lower- and middle-income Illinoisans
- › Generate additional revenue to fund our schools and state services
- › Fix Illinois' structural budget deficit

LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW THE FAIR TAX WILL BENEFIT AT YOU AT IFT-AFT.ORG/FAIRTAX

IFT endorsed candidates

We all know how important it is for not only our members, but also their families and friends to get out the vote. Included is a list of IFT endorsed candidates in the AFT Local 604 territory that stretches from Illinois to Iowa and from Gilman to Sugar Grove. The list does not include local races, yet.

Remember, early voting begins Sept. 24, and you also have an option to vote by mail.

U.S. President

Joe Biden

Illinois Supreme Court

P. Scott Neville (1st District)
Tom Kilbride (3rd District retain)

U.S. Senate

Dick Durbin

U.S. House

Robin Kelly (IL 2)
Marie Newman (IL 3)
Bill Foster (IL 11)

Illinois Senate

Michael Hastings (19th)
Patrick Joyce (40th)
John Connor (43rd)
Meg Cappel (49th)

Illinois House

Michelle Fadeley (37th)
Debbie Meyers-Martin (38th)
Janet Yang Rohr (41st)
Ken Mejia-Beal (42nd)
Jennifer Zordani (47th)
Lance Yednock (76th)
Charlene Eads (79th)
Anne Stava-Murray (81st)
Barbara Hernandez (83rd)
Stephanie Kifowit (84th)
Dagmara Avelar (85th)
Larry Walsh (86th)
Harry Benton (97th)
Natalie Manley (98th)

Retirees enjoy outing at Bengston's Pumpkin Farm



Above, left to right: Jan Benson, Anita Schluter Wilson, Karen Stiehr, Karen Benson, Carla's niece Marie, Carla Thomas, & Jurate Pezze.



Above, Sped Ed paraprofessional, directing traffic for supply pickup, Laura Georgiou. Photo provided by Stella Kapusta, Secretary/Registrar @ Homer.



Above, A BIT OF HUMOR~~Principal, Brad Elliott from Herscher High School is peeking into Kathy King's home window looking to "evaluate" her work as she works remotely due to Covid-19. Kathy has been a special needs teacher for 30 years at Herscher High School.



Treasurers' Turn

Sean Hunt, AFT Local 604 Treasurer/
Business Mngr.

Just a quick reminder for all council treasurers. Please send the Certification to Employer forms to your business office and to AFT Local 604. Also, please send any changes to your council rosters to AFT Local 604 as well. Please make sure that you are working on your council audits and Form 990s. The council audit is due to AFT Local 604 by **November 15, 2020**. As always, I will be more than happy to assist you with completing your Form 990. You can call (815) 725-0402 or email me at shunt@ift-aft.org.

Thanks,

Sean

Our Local 604 office is up and running full time now but due to the effects of Covid 19, the AFT Local 604 office will have new office hours. 8:00 am—3:00 pm Monday-Friday until further notice. If you should need to stop in for any reason after 3:00 pm, please just give us a call and we will accommodate you the best we can! 815/725-0402 or email darmerc@ift-aft.org anytime. Thank you for your understanding.



IFT/AFT, AFL-CIO

UPDATE

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www.aftlocal604.org

Covid Office Hours: 8:00am-3:00pm Monday-Friday

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Erik Jurgens, Local 604 Field Service Director
Katie Kollross, IFT Field Service Director
Dan Mercer, IFT Field Service Director
Todd Stachowiak, IFT Field Service Director
Kathy Harris, IFT Secretary
Angela Rallis, IFT Secretary

Next Senate Meeting
Wednesday, December 9, 2020 @ 5:00 PM
Will be done by Zoom

Holiday party will not be permissible this year w/ our restrictions on gatherings.