



From Welfare-Fund Surplus

Pandemic Payback: OSA Giving 'Vaccinated' \$500

By RICHARD STEIER Sep 2, 2021

Earlier this summer, Organization of Staff Analysts Chairman Robert J. Croghan took an informal survey of 50 union board members, staffers and volunteers who did work in its offices and found that 12 of them hadn't been vaccinated against the coronavirus and opposed getting inoculated.

Some had legitimate objections, he said during a Sept. 1 phone interview: three said they wanted to see the U.S. Food and Drug Administration give final approval, and a woman who planned to have children said she was fearful that the vaccine could cause complications for her.

Upping the Ante

But seeing the limited success of incentives ranging from sports tickets to free food to the \$100 Mayor de Blasio offered city employees who hadn't yet gotten the shots, Mr. Croghan saw the potential to use a surplus in the OSA welfare fund that was partly, and inadvertently, created by the virus to up the ante on a reward, and in a way that wouldn't make those who got

vaccinated early feel that decision had have cost them financially.

His union's welfare fund offers members vision and dental benefits as well as an extension of Major Medical coverage not included under their city health plans. Many of OSA's nearly 8,000



OSA Chair Robert Croghan

members — 4,700 active employees, the remainder retirees, had post-poned visits to their dentists and optometrists last year to limit their exposure to infection during the heart of the pandemic. As a result, the union saved more than \$2 million in benefit costs that it typically would have incurred.

He discussed with his fellow welfare fund trustees — Michael Daflos, Michael Schady, Wilfrid St. Surin and Joan Smith — and the fund's administrator, Sheila Gorsky, making a \$500 payment to each vaccinated member, using

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that savings and a surplus that previously existed in the fund, and they agreed to go forward.

They sent an Aug. 16 letter to all OSA members explaining the proposal.

Emphasized Vaccine Pluses

“By now, most of us have volunteered to be vaccinated and are the better for it,” the letter stated. “Even if we contract the disease, we are nearly fifty times less likely to need hospitalization. Even a mild case can be hard to suffer through but, by reports so far, unlikely to be fatal if we are vaccinated.”

It continued, “Others have resisted or delayed vaccination for a wide variety of reasons. New York City's reaction to this has been to move slowly towards compulsion. We are unhappy about this.”

The letter went on to state, “We do recognize the legitimate fears of a resurgence of this plague in the coming Fall and we agree that vaccination seems our clearest means of limiting the impact. However, we vastly prefer voluntary cooperation over forced compliance.”

It informed members that all those who were vaccinated would receive the union's Health Benefit Award—created Aug. 2—plus the \$500 payment, which would be disbursed by the ASO (Administrative Services Only) firm.

'Some Choices Affect Others'

The letter concluded, “Please keep in mind that we all agree that individual choice is very important, but that some of our choices affect others. We do hope that enough of us choose to be vaccinated to achieve ‘herd immunity,’ defeat Covid, and make unnecessary the move toward compulsion.”

In the first two weeks after the offer was made, Mr. Croghan said that at least five of the

12 hold-outs discovered in the union’s informal survey had gotten vaccinated. That included two of the three people who had said they were waiting for FDA approval, which came Aug. 23 for the Pfizer vaccine.

“I did get a few people who are strong anti-vaxxers very angry at me,” he said, “but c'est la vie. I do think it's appropriate to reward everyone who went ahead and got the shots.”

The Health Benefit Award stated to recipients that it was given “in honor of your commitment to those principles of social solidarity by getting vaccinated against COVID-19. OSA is working to protect the health and safety of all our brothers and sisters. We thank you for helping us all by doing your part.”

Mr. Croghan, who said the de Blasio administration hadn't seemed eager to negotiate with the unions on vaccination protocols despite the Mayor's insistence he wanted to get an agreement, noted, “If there's a high percentage of people who are vaccinated, there are less likely to be vaccine mandates.”



AN INCLUSIVE INCENTIVE: In contrast to several recent inoculation-incentive programs, including the one offered by the de Blasio administration, the Organization of Staff Analysts is giving a \$500 bonus to all members who get vaccinated, including those who did so well before it informed members of the program in an Aug. 16 letter. Photo courtesy of FDNY