The Federationist

SMITH HILL REPORT

Published by the RI Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals, AFT, AFL-CIO *Volume 12, No. 17, April 24, 2009*
www.rifthp.org

Elected Board of Regents

On Wednesday, April 22, the Senate bills that would allow for an elected Board of Regents were heard before the Senate Constitutional and Regulatory Issues Committee. **S0698** by **Senator Gallo** provides for the election and **S0699** also by **Senator Gallo** provides for the necessary Constitutional changes need for an elected Board. The **RIFTHP** testified in ***support*** of the bills. The bills would maintain the size of the Regents at nine members. The bills propose that each of the five Rhode Island counties would elect a Regent, and an additional four members would be elected on a state-wide basis. The term of office for the elected Regents would be four years.

While recognizing the hard work of many of the members of the Board of Regents, Marcia Reback testified in support of these bills allowing for the Board of Regents to be an elected body. She testified that the current process of appointing members is highly politicized, resulting in a Board that responds only to their appointee, rather than to the public.

Recently we have seen the Regents routinely ignoring the public, including parents and teachers, something that would not happen if the Board were elected and accountable to the general public, as all public elected officials are.

Currently, because of the appointee process, there are only two regents with a background in education. Opening up the process to the general public would give the opportunity for citizens with a history in education to serve on the Board.

RIFTHP is a Co-Sponsor of this Event and Encourages all Members and their Families to Attend

The Campaign for Rhode Island's *Priorities*

A Budget that Reflects East Providence and Pawtucket's Priorities

When: Monday, April 27 @ 6:00 PM

Where: East Providence Senior Center
510 Waterman Ave, E. Prov.

What: A discussion with our General Assembly members about how the 2010 State Budget will impact our towns and communities

Moderated by Tom Sgouros, editor of the Rhode Island Policy Reporter

Greta Abbott of the League of Women Voters testified against the bill, raising concerns about the potential under-representation of urban areas should the Board become an elected body.

Anna Cano-Morales, a member of the Board of Regents and also the Chair of the Central Falls Board of Trustees, opposed the legislation. She testified about her own experience and the need for diversity on the Board that she believes will be protected by the Governor having appointing authority.

Henry Boeniger of the NEA/RI testified in support of the bill. He commented on the current Board being made up predominantly of wealthy suburbanites from East Greenwich (the Governor's home town) and Barrington. He and President Reback both told the committee of the lack of accountability in the current system as evidenced by recent changes to special education regulations.

Last year, there was an outpouring of opposition to proposed changes to special education regulations including the elimination of class size provisions. The Chair of the Board of Regents, Robert Flanders, failed to attend even one of the four public hearings. The Regents approved those changes despite approximately 700 residents objecting to the proposal. President Reback and Henry Boeniger noted that such lack of accountability would be rectified by creating an elected Board.

RIFTHP Sends Letter to General Assembly Members Concerning Revenue

The following are excerpts from the letter sent by **Marcia Reback**, President of the RIFTHP, to the General Assembly regarding the **RIFTHP's** position on revenue considerations:

> "I am writing on behalf of the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals which represents 12,000 members who work as classroom teachers and teacher assistants, professors, nurses and public employees. Most of our local unions have already experienced layoffs, position cuts, and wage and benefit concessions because of these difficult economic times.
>
> As we approach the May Revenue Estimating Conference, it is important to consider Rhode Island's tax and budget policy over the last decade. The state has enacted a number of tax cuts for the highest income earners in the state; include instituting the alternative flat tax and providing preferential treatment to income earned from the sale of capital gains, in the hopes that these would spur job growth. At the same time, working families have seen surging property taxes; devastating cuts to health care, nursing homes, and child care; layoffs and forced retirements of state employees; and cuts to social programs essential to our communities.
>
> With Rhode Island experiencing one of the highest unemployment rates in the country, and one of the fastest growths in unemployment in the last 18 months, it is clear that this strategy is not working."
>
> "However, our General Assembly has yet to express a willingness to seriously consider what Rhode Islanders overwhelmingly support, the repeal of tax breaks for the wealthiest Rhode Islanders. I was shocked to learn that about 65% of those who benefit from the flat tax don't even live in Rhode Island. Further cuts to health care, education, and cities and towns will result in layoffs and cut backs in hours. This is contrary to what Rhode Islanders need right now--jobs. At a minimum, Rhode Island must avoid cuts that will result in more layoffs, less spending, and a deepening of our economic crisis."
>
> "The federal stimulus package has helped us avoid complete disaster for now, but it is time to recognize that the state budget crisis is not a spending problem and cannot be solved by cuts alone. We need to look at the revenue side, and we should begin by repealing unsustainable, unaffordable, and unproductive tax cuts that favor the wealthiest. For these reasons, RIFTHP strongly urges the General Assembly to repeal the alternative flat tax and to end the preferential treatment given to capital gains."

Bill Introductions
House Bills

- **Joint Study Commission on Teacher Preparation**
  (**H5896** *Fox, House Constituent Services*)
  This resolution would create a nineteen (19) member special legislative study commission whose purpose it would be to study the establishment of a blueprint for a new generation of teacher education in Rhode Island and who would report back to the General Assembly no later than February 1, 2011.

- **School Medication Administration**
  (**H6035** *Lally, House Health, Education and Welfare*)
  This act would provide that the department of health would promulgate rules and regulations governing the administration of medications, including, but not limited to, psychotropic medications, to children in school settings.