



# SMITH HILL REPORT

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[www.rifthp.org](http://www.rifthp.org)

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## **Happy New Year!**

2009 was an especially challenging year for RIFTHP members. Pension cuts were enacted despite our two-year campaign to ask politicians to “Keep the Promise” and preserve pension benefits supported by high employee contributions. The Union was successful in fending off many proposals to limit our rights to bargain. Budget cuts impacted all public and private sector contract negotiations as Rhode Island’s high unemployment rate severely impacted State revenue. Despite the RIFTHP changing its position to support binding arbitration of teacher

contract disputes, the Assembly leaders that promised action on the legislation failed to bring it up for a vote during the special session convened in October. They also failed to enact legislation to ensure contract provisions continue while a new contract is being negotiated. We look forward to a better New Year than the previous, though the challenges we are anticipating this year closely resemble the challenges we faced in 2009.

## **Smith Hill Report Enters Thirteenth Year**

2010 marks the thirteenth consecutive year that the RIFTHP has published a newsletter during the legislative session of the Rhode Island General Assembly. The Smith Hill Report will be published regularly until the session closes this summer. The newsletter is designed to provide basic information on legislation of interest to the RIFTHP membership and will provide summaries of testimony offered by the Union on important bills.

The Smith Hill Report is published in both print and electronic form. Questions about the distribution should be directed to Kenn Fontaine at [riftkenn@aol.com](mailto:riftkenn@aol.com) or at 273-9800. Questions about specific legislation should be directed to RIFTHP Field Representative and lobbyist James Parisi at [rifjim@aol.com](mailto:rifjim@aol.com) or by calling him at 273-9800.

The next several issues of the SHR will contain lists of all Senators and Representatives with their contact information as well as the committee assignments of the House and Senate. Please keep these handy as you will want to contact your own representatives during this coming session. All issues of the SHR are available online at [www.rifthp.org](http://www.rifthp.org).

## **Election Recaps**

Thomas Slater was elected to represent House District 10 in the West End of Providence in 1994. He passed away in August, 2009. His son, Scott Slater was the top vote getter in a seven person primary election on October 6. Scott Slater asked for and received the endorsement of the RIFTHP. Scott Slater won the Special Election on November 10 with 66% of the vote.

On December 29, RIFTHP endorsed candidate Mary Duffy Messier won the Special Election held to fill the House District 62 garnering 61% of the votes cast in a three-way race. This seat, which is 80% Pawtucket and 20% East Providence, was vacated by Elizabeth Dennigan who resigned in October to run for Congress in the Rhode Island 2<sup>nd</sup> Congressional District.

## **Session Opens January 5**

The General Assembly will convene on Tuesday, January 5, to face the growing fiscal deficit caused by less than expected State revenue and greater than expected State spending. The first month of the session is normally devoted to bill introductions, as the deadline for submitting legislation is February 11. Most bills will have formal hearings between the February and

April school vacations, except for bills assigned to the House Finance Committee, which can be heard at any time during the session. The deadline to act on bills, other than bills in the Finance Committee, is April 8, 2010. Please keep in mind that the deadlines are flexible and there are ways to introduce and pass legislation submitted after the deadline.

## **2010 Preview**

In mid-December, Governor Carcieri released his proposed bill to balance the current fiscal year budget. The State budget was adopted in June, for a fiscal year (FY 2010) which runs from July 1, 2009 to June 30, 2010. The FY 2010 is already in a deficit of \$220 million. The Carcieri proposal has not yet been formally introduced as a bill, but a summary is available for review at <http://www.rilin.state.ri.us/SenateFinance/>.

The Carcieri proposal closes the projected deficit by cutting local government funding and targeting public sector workers. Of the projected \$220 deficit, Governor Carcieri proposes to balance the current budget by:

- Reducing aid to cities and towns (\$65 million).
- Cutting school district funding 3% in his effort to have school employees accept a 3% wage reduction (\$20 million).
- Cutting the pension COLA for all teachers and state workers who were not eligible to retire as of September 30, 2009, and anyone who retires after enactment of the Supplemental Budget (\$43 million).

His proposal also would:

- Suspend Caruolo actions which permit school districts to go to court to get adequate funding from cities and towns.
- Require City / Town Councils to ratify school district union contracts.
- Reduce pensions for municipal workers, including school district support staff, police and firefighters.
- Require public sector workers to pay a minimum 25% cost-share for medical insurance.