

# The FEDERATIONIST



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RIFTHP Holds Social

## Full-Day Kindergarten, Elimination of Residency Requirements Highlight 2000 Session

As the 2000 session of the Rhode Island General Assembly winds down, several important RIFTHP reform initiatives are poised to be enacted into law. The House of Representatives passed a budget that includes several important RIFTHP proposals to improve public education and improve the quality of health care.

### Education Initiatives

For several years, the RIFTHP has asked for state money to implement full-day kindergarten in public schools. Our early efforts focused on state funding for full-day kindergarten for all students eligible for free/reduced price lunches. Later, in an effort to contain costs and garner political support, the Union supported an effort to create a state fund to be used as an incentive for full-day kindergarten for the districts which implement full-day programs.

Last year, the Governor budgeted money for full-day kindergarten, but the General Assembly did not fund it. Bills were introduced on the issue this year by Rep. Moura, Rep. Montanaro, Rep. Aisha Odiase and Sen. Cicilline. The Governor's

budget contained \$2.4 million that will be given to school districts based on their existing enrollment in full-day kindergarten, weighted by their tax effort. The Assembly supported this portion of the education budget. Providence, which has had the vast majority of total Rhode Island students in full-day kindergarten, will get more than \$2.1 million. Warwick will receive \$14,500. Communities that establish full-day kindergarten this year will be eligible to receive funding next year.

Another RIFTHP priority for several years has been the elimination of residency requirements for school teachers. Woonsocket voters rejected residency requirements in a city referendum last election. Pawtucket and Providence have maintained their municipal residency requirements although the Pawtucket City Council had moved to place that issue before Pawtucket voters this November. The RIFTHP, the Commissioner of Education, and bill sponsors have argued that the pool of qualified job applicants is limited because of residency requirements and that residency requirements

have a negative effect on education quality. The FY 2001 budget, as passed by the House, contains a prohibition of municipal residency requirements for public school teachers and administrators effective September 1, 2001. The RIFTHP lauds this budget article as a necessary means to protect teacher quality and to provide reasonable freedom to teachers in selecting where they choose to reside.

The state budget also contained money to expand the Rhode Island program of providing private school students with loaned textbooks. The existing textbook loan program is administered and paid for by the local school district which must provide any math, science or foreign language textbook used by any public school in Rhode Island to private school students. The Catholic Church sought to expand the textbook loan program to include English, Social Studies and other textbooks. The RIFTHP, the ACLU and the Rhode Island Association of School Committees all voiced opposition to the legislation tiled by Rep. Tom Slater. After a strong lobby effort, the private schools' interest prevailed and the textbook loan program will be expanded to include

## *Bits and Pieces...*

### **RI Senate Passed Many of Our Bills - But Disappointed Us on Downsizing**

I like the fact the both my state representative and senator know my name. They also know when the tree in



front of my house died and that there's a new lilac bush in the yard.

Of course, as someone who is registered to lobby, these politicians would be expected to know me and I them.

But, they also know the Craigs who live in the house on the right and the MacManus's who are on the opposite side. They are able to refer to everyone in the neighborhood on a first name basis.

Six years ago the Constitution of Rhode Island was changed to alter what are now our neighborhoods into larger political subdivisions. The RI House of Representatives recognized the wisdom of allowing us voters to revisit the original votes.

The year of the downsizing I remember that the public had become angry because legislators were in the Employees' Retirement System. No one who has discussed this with me disputes that the public was in a retributive mood and would have voted on any measure to show its displeasure with the Assembly.

The vote didn't concern only downsizing. It was rolled into the debate about

the then trendy term limit for office holders. And some very wealthy individuals in Rhode Island put their money and influence behind selling a four-year term governor. But in my opinion what really drove the vote was the issue of removing the legislators from the Employees Retirement System. Talk radio was filled with, "Get the bums out."

What is significant is that the vote was treated as one question. If you were opposed to term limits but believed in the four-year term, you had to choose. You couldn't separate your vote into parts. In my opinion, the issue of the Retirement System really drove the question. And with that, the referendum passed only by a 51.6% vote. Clearly not a mandate.

So whose voices rose against the downsizing six years ago? Primarily the labor movement, community and minority groups. Inevitably, with downsizing, minority representation in the House of Representatives will be diminished. Excellent legislators will be vying for the same seat. The strength of the urban core of the state will diminish, yielding a greater presence to the border communities. This will occur in any event, but the larger the presence, the greater the impact. For all of us, a larger presence is important. It has been predicted that

between Providence and Pawtucket alone more than ten seats will be lost.

It was a deep disappointment that the Senate chose not to put the item on the ballot for individuals to express their view, separated out from the questions of legislative retirement, four-year terms and term limits. I would like to know that my Senator and Representative look upon me and the people on my street as neighbors as well as constituents. And I have been around long enough to know that the closer you are to the people who represent you, the greater the probability that you will be represented well.

***Inevitably, with downsizing, minority representation in the House of Representatives will be diminished. "***

#### CARTOONS WANTED

We dislike using an idea already established in the major newspaper in Rhode Island, but one of their pages is entertaining and is made up of cartoons drawn and captioned by local people about ideas of local interest.

The Federationist will pay \$25 to individuals who submit cartoons which are ultimately published in our newsletter. We will return unpublished cartoons to those who send an appropriately stamped, self-addressed return envelope.

Artist and address for checks to be mailed to must be clearly identified.

Submissions should be made to Editor, Federationist, RIFTHP, 356 Smith St., Providence, RI 02908.

## Guest Speaker

### Rating the Dentist

My dentist is great! He sends me reminders so I don't forget checkups. He uses the latest techniques based on research. He never hurts me, and I've got all my teeth. When I ran into him the other day, I was eager to see if he'd heard about the new (New York) State Program. I knew he'd think it was great.

"Did you hear about the new state program to measure the effectiveness of dentists with their young patients?" I said.

"No," he said. He didn't seem too thrilled. "How will they do that?"

"It's quite simple," I said. "They will just count the number of cavities each patient has at age 10,14, and 18 and average that to determine a dentist's rating. Dentists will be rated as Excellent, Good, Average, Below Average and Unsatisfactory. That way parents will know which are the best dentists. It will also encourage the less effective dentists to get better," I said. "Poor dentists who don't improve could lose their licenses to practice."

"That's terrible," he said.

"What? That's not a good attitude," I said. "Don't you think we should try to improve children's dental health in this state?,"

"Sure I do," he said, "but that's not a fair way to determine who is practicing good dentistry."

"Why not?," I said. "It makes perfect sense to me."

"Well, it's so obvious," he said. "Don't you see that dentists don't all work with the same clientele; so much depends on things we can't control? For example," he said, "I work in a rural area with a high percentage of patients from deprived homes, while some of my colleagues work in upper middle class neighborhoods. Many of the parents I work with don't bring their children to see me until there is some kind of problem and I don't get to do much preventive work. Also," he said, "many of the parents I serve let their kids eat way too much candy from an early age, unlike more educated parents who understand the relationship between sugar and decay. To top it all off," he added, "so many of my clients have well water which is untreated and has no fluoride in it. Do you have any idea how much difference early use of fluoride can make?,"

"It sounds like you're making excuses," I said. I couldn't believe my dentist would be so defensive.

"I am not making excuses!" he said. "My best patients are as good as anyone's, my work is as good as anyone's, but my average cavity count is going to be higher than a lot of other dentists because I

choose to work where I am needed most."

"Don't get touchy,, I said. "Touchy?," he said. His face had turned red and from the way he was clenching and unclenching his jaw, I was afraid he was going to damage his teeth. "Try furious. In a system like this, I will end up being rated average, below average, or worse. My more educated patients who see these ratings may believe this so-called rating actually is a measure of my ability and proficiency as a dentist. They may leave me, and I'll be left with only the most needy patients. And my cavity average score will get even worse. On top of that, how will I attract good dental hygienists and other excellent dentists to my practice if it is labeled below average?"

"I think you are overreacting," I said. "Complaining, excuse making and stonewalling won't improve dental health...I am quoting from a leading member of the DOC," I noted.

"What's the DOC?" he asked. "It's the Dental Oversight Committee," I said, "a group made up of mostly laypersons to make sure dentistry in this state gets improved."

"Spare me,, he said. "I can't believe this. Reasonable people won't go for it."

The program sounded reasonable to me, so I asked, "How else would you measure good dentistry?,"

"Come watch me work," he said. "Observe my processes."

"That's too complicated and time consuming," I said. "Cavities are the bottom

line, and you can't argue with the bottom line. It's an absolute measure."

"That's what I'm afraid my parents and prospective patients will think. This can't be happening," he said.

"Now, now," I said, "don't despair. The state will help ou some."

"How?," he said. "If you're rated poorly, they'll send a dentist who is rated excellent to help straighten you out," I said brightly.

"You mean," he said, "they'll send a dentist with a wealthy clientele to show me how to work on severe juvenile dental problems with which I have probably had much more experience? Big help."

"There you go again," I said. "You aren't acting professionally at all."

"You don't get it," he said. "Doing this would be like grading schools and teachers on an average score on a test of children's progress without regard to influences outside the school, the home, the community served and stuff like that. Why would they do something so unfair to dentists? No one would ever think of doing that to schools."

I just shook my head sadly, but he had brightened.

"I'm writing to my representatives and senator," he said. "I'll use the school analogy. Surely they will see the point."

He walked off with that look of hope mixed with fear and suppressed anger that I see in the mirror so often lately.

## FNHP News



### RI Contingent Attends FNHP Conference, Lobbies Congress

Between June 1 and June 4, a group of 14 home care and hospital nurses and health professionals traveled to Washington D.C. to take part in the AFT/FNHP Professional Issues Conference. Members and officers from RIFTHP Locals 5018, 5022, and 5090, which represent nurses and health professionals at St. Joseph's Hospital, the Visiting Nurse Association of Care New England and the Visiting Nurse Services of Newport and Bristol, and the Visiting Nurse Association of Rhode Island, respectively, returned to their locals energized by the conference, the theme of which was "Changing the Balance of Power: Taking on the Health Care Crisis."

The Local 5022 group lobbied the Rhode Island Congressional delegation on Thursday, June 1, meeting with staff from the offices of Congressman Weygand and Senators Reed and Chafee. They advanced initiatives that would correct draconian cuts to home health funding.

Other APT-supported bills would set a patients' bill of rights, establish whistleblower protections for health professionals, and protect against needlestick injuries. The group found the experience to be particularly empowering, as so many of the difficulties facing health

care members flow from decisions made by Congress.

The group attended workshops on impending changes to the Medicare system for funding home health visits, which many found to be very enlightening, on strengthening their locals, on "getting the dirt on their employer," on the causes of the nursing crisis, and on violence in the workplace, to name a few. General sessions included a rousing address by health care author Suzanne Gordan, an update from the field on organizing battles and successes from John August, Director of Organization/Health Care, APT, a report on the success of the 49-day

nurses' strike at St. Vincent's Hospital in Worcester, and a report on the California Nurses Association's successful efforts to establish safe staffing legislation. The closing session, which the group described as "awesome," included an uplifting visual and musical art performance, and an inspiring presentation of "the international perspective," as nurses from Canada, Ireland, and New Zealand reported their view of the health care crisis, and their observations that their own national, universal health systems are far more rational, and less administratively cumbersome, than the "system" of health care delivery in the U.S.

*Photo by Michael Campbell*



Front row (L-R): Alma Egan, Mary Seccareccia, Jeanne Brockway, Mary Thomsen. Middle row (L-R): Pat Calvin. Joan D'Amico, Teri Linehan, Nancy Harrington. Jan Saran. Back row (L-R): Michael Mullane, Jan Clements. Earleen Scott, Jim Doelling, Hilda Bucci. Missing from photo: Joanne Chaffee

## RIFNHP Leadership Meets

Leadership from the Rhode Island FNHP locals met on Thursday, June 8th at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Warwick. The agenda for the meeting included a report by Rep. Betsy Dennigan, RN, who spoke about three bills she has been working on during this session of the General Assembly:

\* **H6832 — Needlestick Prevention** This Dennigan bill would establish a needlestick prevention advisory committee within the RI Department of Health (DOH) to promote needlestick prevention. The Federation testified in support of the bill in the House HEW Committee on Feb. 16 noting that the cost of new needlestick prevention technology is low, but cost due to injuries to health care workers and the investigation of needlestick injuries is very high.

\* **H7654 — Elimination of the use of latex products in hospitals** would require the Director of the DOH to promulgate rules and regulations, which would require all hospitals in Rhode Island to eliminate the use of latex products by June 30, 2002.

\* **H7946 — Hospital Staffing Levels** seeks to create an advisory council, which would identify hospital staffing problems and establish criteria for reporting on quality care issues.

Retired RIFTHP Executive Secretary Ed Casey, who was recently appointed to the RI Board of Nurse

Licensure, provided an overview of the Board's activities during the last year. Ed briefly outlined an effort by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing to implement a mutual recognition model of nurse licensure which would allow a nurse to have one license (in his or her state of residency) and practice in other states. Professional nursing organizations, including the RIFTHP have been strongly opposed to the Council's proposal because of the potential that multi-state practice could be used to circumvent existing public policy or laws, including laws on the use of strikebreakers and striker replacement workers.

Jim Parisi, RIFTHP Field Representative and Lobbyist, reported that the Federation is tracking more than 100 health care bills this session, including:

\* **H7262 — Statewide Commission to Review Hospital Staffing.** On May 10th the RIFTHP testified in support of Rep. Bea Lanzi's bill to create a statewide commission to review hospital staffing including both nursing and ancillary staff. Jim's testimony highlighted FNHP members at St. Joseph Hospital for Specialty Care, noting that in recent years the hospital has increased its reliance on per-diem employees to staff the units.

\* **H7674 — Regulate Selective Health Care Networks** sponsored by Rep.

Paul Moura, would require the DOH to create standards for approving exclusive network contracts. Jim testified at the House Finance Committee meeting on June 6th in support of the bill, and expressed concern that selective networks would devastate Rhode Island non-profit hospitals and visiting nurse agencies.

\* **S2275 — Increase funding for home nursing care,** introduced for the second year by Sen. David Iglizzi, would require the state to provide assistance to the elderly for extraordinary health care expenses. Jim testified in support of the bill on February 15th citing the importance of creating a program to aid the elderly in obtaining home nursing care.

Union leaders working at St. Joseph Hospital for Specialty Care, VNA of Care New England, the Visiting Nurse Service of Newport and Bristol Counties, and VNA of Rhode Island attended the meeting.



Rep. Elizabeth Dennigan addresses RIFNHP Professional Issues Seminar.

## RIFTHP to Host ER & D National Trainina

ER & D is the backbone of the RIFTHP's Professional Issues program for the K-12 division. A research-based professional development program, ER & D combines hands-on activities, validated research, and practical strategies to provide opportunities for colleagues to strengthen their teaching skills. ER & D is a colleague-to-colleague approach to sharing valuable information about teaching, relying on nationally-trained classroom practitioners and other local union leaders to present information and lead discussions. This summer, the RIFTHP, in partnership with the American Federation of Teachers, is hosting

an ER & D National Training Institute in Rhode Island.

The ER & D Institute will prepare local leaders to act as trainers in Beginning Reading, Reading Comprehension and Thinking Mathematics. Usually offered in Washington, DC, the week-long training is being held in Rhode Island in response to our members' need for professional development in these content areas. The newly-trained ER & D Coordinators will develop local action plans to strengthen already existing local programs, enabling locals to meet district and building-based professional development needs and assist the RIFTHP with its statewide programs.



## Skills Commission to Open Course One Training to School Teams

The Rhode Island Skills Commission will host a "Course One" Summer Institute July 31st through August 3rd at Hope Highlands Elementary School in Cranston. "Course One" is the professional development opportunity designed by the National Center on Education and the Economy (New Standards) to assist teachers in designing standards-based instructional units. Course One has been used successfully by the Skills Commission and its partner districts in building

awareness of standards and strategies for helping students meet them. While Course One has usually been available only to Skills Commission districts, RI Middle Level Educators or schools that have had a SALT visit, the Skills Commission has opened up this institute to teams from any Rhode Island school interested in standards-based education. For registration information call Bethanie Maduro at the RI Skills Commission (521-3191).



*Charlecn Christy, ER & D Trainer from Pawtucket Teachers Alliance*

### RIFTHP Summer Institute

School may have ended early this June, but many RIFTHP local members stayed in the classroom.. this time as "students". The RIFTHP ER & D Summer Institute attracted a great deal of interest this summer. Held in conjunction with the Cranston, Warwick and West Warwick's IREAD grant, approximately 200 people participated in ER & D classes in Early Reading Intervention, Reading Comprehension, Managing Anti-Social Behavior and Mentor Training.

## Toledo Union Leader Shares Insights on Mentoring

On May 1st Dal Lawrence, former president of the Toledo, Ohio, Federation of Teachers, brought his views on new teacher induction and mentoring to Rhode Island. As part of a Technical Assistance for Mentoring grant that the RIFTHP received this year from RIDE, Lawrence, a nationally recognized leader in providing union support for new teachers, met with school teams and with RIFTHP union leaders.

The teams, made up of local union leaders and administrators, met earlier this year with RIFTHP Director of Professional Issues Colleen Callahan Bielecki and three representatives of the RIFTHP Mentor Network, Charleen Christy, Nancy Brown and Jackie Bourassa, to assess their local mentoring programs and identify areas in need of further development.

RIFTHP locals represent the full spectrum of mentoring provided in Rhode Island, from programs just getting started to programs like Central Falls, Pawtucket, Coventry, Providence and West Warwick that are more mature. The meetings facilitated by the RIFTHP resulted in the identification of some common areas of concern, such as recruiting mentors and finding time for mentoring to take place.

As an example of an effective mentor program that locals could look to as a model, the RIFTHP turned

to Toledo. In the early 80's, Dal Lawrence began a successful union-led induction program for new teachers in Toledo that has grown to a full-time program providing early and continuous support for teachers and includes peer assistance and review. Throughout his presentation, Da! challenged local mentor leaders to appropriately resource their programs and to release mentors to visit new teachers in their classrooms and to conference with them about their teaching throughout the year.

Meeting with local union presidents later in the afternoon, he initiated a lively discussion about evaluation systems and the role of teachers in deciding who enters and who remains in the teaching profession.

Article 31 mandates mentoring for new teachers, but does not give clear guidance to locals in establishing mentor programs. Through the RIFTHP Mentor Network and the assistance being provided by Kathy Rainone and Paula Akers, two Central Falls union leaders currently on loan to RIDE as Regents Fellows for Mentoring, that guidance is beginning to take shape. By bringing experts like Dal Lawrence to Rhode Island, the RIFTHP is "kicking it up a notch" and encouraging locals to look critically at the support they are providing new teachers and to strengthening their existing programs.



*Dal Lawrence, former president of the Toledo Federation of Teachers, and former AFT vice president*

*"RIFTHP locals are really taking the lead in providing support for new teachers in Rhode Island. Dal Lawrence has taken that lead nationally and the expertise he shared with our locals provides us with a challenging image to strive for, as we take our programs to the next level of effectiveness."*

*Colleen Callahan Bielecki*

## Skills Commission Districts Pilot CIM Assessment System



*CIM students are honored for their hard work.*

“CIMply the Best”!

That’s how fifty students who participated in a pilot of the Rhode Island Skills Commission’s Certificate of Initial Mastery were at a celebration held recently in their honor at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Warwick.

Since 1992, nine Rhode Island school districts have worked on the development of a Certificate of Initial Mastery (CIM) with the Rhode Island Skills Commission, a unique partnership among RIDE, the RI Human Resource Investment Council, NEA/RI and the RI Federation of Teachers & Health Professionals. The CIM is intended to be an endorsement of the high school diploma signifying that a set of rigorous academic and applied learning standards has been met.

What started out eight years ago as an idea to provide an incentive for students to meet higher standards and prove to the business and higher education communities that our high school graduates were well prepared for college level work or entrance into

worthwhile careers, has become an important motivational tool for students, teachers and administrators working to meet the standards required by Article 3 1 and SALT. The nine districts’ (Central Falls, Coventry, Foster-Glocester, Jamestown, Lincoln, Middletown, Pawtucket, Providence and West Warwick) involvement in the CIM initiative has given them a “leg up” on Rhode Island’s move to a standards-driven educational system.

During the past four months, three of the nine districts have worked on a pilot of the CIM assessment system. Approximately fifty students from Coventry, Lincoln and Middletown participated in the pilot by agreeing to have their statewide assessment scores in English/Language Arts and Math reviewed along with their work from a series of on-demand and extended tasks and a capstone project designed to measure their mastery of both content and applied learning standards. The aim

of the pilot was two-fold: to compile examples of the kind of student work that would be worthy of earning a CIM and to find out the implications for schools, administrators, teachers and students in implementing a truly standards-based certification system for students.

The results are coming together and confirming what we might have guessed. This is hard work! Talking about standards is one thing, but putting them into place is quite another. The CIM pilot has raised some interesting and challenging questions about the time needed for students to work on extended tasks and capstone projects, the professional development needed by teachers to become more standards based in their instruction and assessment, the many issues surrounding the judging of student work against a standards-based rubric and the support systems needed by students if we truly mean it when we say that we want ALL students to have the opportunity to reach high standards.

The teachers who acted as CIM Coordinators, Joyce Conti and Lise Robideaux in

Lincoln, Judy Baxter and Jim Erinakes in Coventry and Josephine Maguire in Middletown spent countless hours after school and on weekends guiding students and looking at student work and performance. The students themselves volunteered to take on an extra workload on top of already demanding 10th grade schedules of class work, homework, sports, activities and part-time jobs. All of this was supported by a unique partnership between the teachers’ unions and school administrations at both the local and state level that sends a very clear message about the kind of collaboration needed in order to support real gains in student achievement.

After the work of the pilot has been studied by assessment experts and the practitioners involved, true implementation will begin and the first Certificates of Initial Mastery will be awarded in the spring of 2001. It is hoped that the CIM effort will spread statewide as the CIM becomes recognized and valued as an indication of the kind of high quality education our public schools can provide. The students, teachers, administrators and union leaders involved in the pilot are truly “pioneers”, as RIFTHP President Marcia Reback referred to them at the recent CIM celebration at the Crowne Plaza Hotel. Their hard work is paving the way for an educational system based on high standards that values collaboration and recognizes an endeavor achievement.

English/Language Arts and Social Studies textbooks limited to K-8. Instead of requiring local schools to pick up the additional cost, the state is providing \$320,000 to pay for the program's expansion.

The education budget also included a brief directive that the General Assembly prepare a report on the benefits of a statewide teacher contract to be issued by March 31, 2001.

## Health Care

The RIFTHP joined other advocates in pressing the General Assembly to protect health care workers and patients from unsafe staffing. The Union testified in support of legislation that created regulations on safe staffing in health care facilities. This year the General Assembly is expected to enact a law requiring hospitals to collect data on their nurse staffing patterns. The state budget also includes \$300,000 to initiate a program by the Department of Health to inspect hospitals, including nurse staffing and investigate complaints.

The RIFTHP also testified in support of legislation to give state financial assistance to home care agencies. H-7591, sponsored by Rep. Elaine Coderre, would increase the existing legislative grant given to all Visiting Nurse Agencies (VNAs). The state budget includes a \$300,000 increase to be shared by the non-profit, community-based VNAs which have suffered greatly because of the pressure of

managed care and the 1997 Federal Balanced Budget Amendment.

## Labor Relations

There is a principle in labor relations that certain past practices that are long standing and mutually recognized can be enforced through the grievance procedure. Recently, the Rhode Island Supreme Court has issued rulings to prevent unions from enforcing past practices through the contract. After extensive discussions with state administrators and municipal officials, legislation was crafted to clearly define what constitutes a past practice that may be grieved. This restores rights to public employees that had been eroded by recent court decisions. The standards and definition of a past practice reflect common standards in labor relations.

Another recent court decision changed the long-standing practice of holding grievance hearings before school committees (and town councils) in closed sessions. Some contracts provide for a hearing before the school committee as part of the grievance procedure prior to submitting the case to arbitration. Superior Court Justice Patricia Hurst, in a case involving the Exeter-West Greenwich School District, ruled that since the hearing was before a public body, that the hearing must be held in open session. Legislation filed by Rep. Paul Moura and Sen. Elizabeth Roberts clarified the long-standing practice of

holding grievance hearings before public bodies in executive session to protect the privacy of grievants and to promote the best possible process for dispute resolution.

## Retirement

The RIFTHP had several initiatives related to pensions and public employment. Our effort to reduce teacher and state employee contributions by 1% failed to get support from the House and Senate leadership. Two initiatives concerning post-retirement have been passed by the General Assembly.

Under existing law, a retiree may work for 75 days (150 half days) for a municipality or school district without loss of pension benefits. There is a growing shortage of substitute teachers. Some school districts have responded by raising the pay rate for retirees who have returned to the classroom as substitutes. Recognizing this trend, the RIFTHP sought to increase the number of days retirees can substitute for an absent classroom teacher without loss of pension benefits. Sen. Ruggiero and Rep. Menard filed legislation increasing the cap to 100 days. Both bills were amended to increase the post-retirement cap to 90 days in a school year.

In another area of post-retirement law, retirees who serve as adjunct faculty in higher education institutions are restricted from earning more than \$10,000 a year without loss of pension ben-

efits. That monetary amount was set in statute in the early 90's. Since the per-credit rate for adjunct faculty has increased, the Union sought to increase the post retirement cap. Legislation filed by Sen. Leo Blais and Rep. Thomas Palangio increased the cap to \$12,000 a year. Both issues received the support of the General Assembly.

## Higher Education

The RIFTHP worked hard to defeat legislation that would grant public higher education sovereign immunity. State sovereign immunity means that individuals cannot sue the state for more than \$100,000 unless a special law is passed by the General Assembly. Because of their autonomy, higher education is not covered by the existing state sovereign immunity statute. The RIFTHP opposed the measure to extend sovereign immunity to higher education because of our concern that it would limit our members' ability to enforce anti-discrimination laws in state court.

Several recent US Supreme Court decisions have eliminated state employees' ability to enforce the Federal Fair Labor Standards Act and the Federal Age Discrimination in Employment Act because of sovereign immunity. Since the Supreme Court prevents state employees from protecting their rights in Federal Court, we sought to preserve the ability to protect employees' rights in state court.

## The Northern RI Collaborative Settles Contract: Goals Achieved

After nearly twelve months of negotiations, including a month of compulsory mediation, the NRICEU, Local 4940, has unanimously ratified a contract covering June 30, 1999 through June 30, 2003.

The Union achieved most of the goals it had set for the negotiations, including significant improvements to the pay scales of non-certified staff at the Collaborative. The new pact establishes scales for certain classifications for which scales had not previously existed, as well as for other classifications, shortens the time for employees to reach top step from sixteen to ten years, and increases the percentage gains between the steps of non-certified scales by two and one-half times over the course of the Agreement.

The contract provides annual salary increases through the application of a formula which averages the salary increases in the ten Collaborative districts. The contract also provides for the participation of non-certified employees in the Municipal Employees Retirement System (MERS), a provision which required agreement not only of the Union and the Collaborative, but also the approval of MERS, the Office of the Attorney General, and the Social Security Administration, and which took over two years to accomplish.

Therapists will be provided a paid lunch, a provi-

sion the Union had sought for years. The contract establishes a sick leave pool for members with long-term illnesses, it doubles the provision of sick days for family purposes, it establishes employees' participation in Temporary Disability Insurance, and it incorporates long-standing seniority practices into contract language.

The Union's success was the result of the coordinated efforts of Union President Francis Casey, RIFTHP Field Rep. Mike Mullane, and the Union's Negotiating Committee. The membership of the local and the Negotiation Team remained resolute throughout. K-12 local presidents from the Collaborative districts whose

Superintendents serve on the Collaborative Board advocated for the cause, the entire field staff offered strategic input, President Marcia Reback intervened to assist in the effort to gain approval of entry into MERS, and the support staff tirelessly gathered information and prepared the documents needed to accomplish the settlement.

Local 4940 represents all certified and non-certified employees at the Collaborative. The Negotiation Committee, which devoted hundreds of hours of unpaid time to the effort, was made up of representatives from nearly all of the seventeen classifications. They are pictured below.

*"We pulled together at every level of the Union to win this contract. The success of our efforts was a true testament to the strength of the Union acting in solidarity"*

**Francis Casey**  
**President**



Front row (L-R): Stacey Tetreault, Peggy Buttenbaum, Francis Casey, Carla Geruso. Susan Joyce. Norm Fortin and Ann Marie DeConti. Back row (L-R): Nancy Duffy Sharon Gray, Diane Suneson and Michael Mullane

## RIFTHP Holds Social Security Seminar

Because many RIFTHP members do not participate in Social Security, a Social Security Seminar was held on June 12th for members of the RIFTHP Executive Council and staff. Lynette Graham of the Social Security Administration in Providence explained the Government Pension Offset (a law that affects spouse's or widow(er)'s benefits) and the Windfall Elimination Provision (a law that affects how your retirement or disability benefits are figured if you receive a pension from work not covered by Social Security).

If you work for an employer who does not withhold Social Security taxes, such as some federal, state or local government agencies, the pension you receive from that employment may reduce your Social Security benefits.

Your benefit can be reduced in one of two ways.

One is called the "government pension offset" and applies if you worked for a federal, state or local gov-

ernment where you did not pay Social Security taxes and are eligible for Social Security benefits as a spouse or widow(er). The government pension offset (GPO) will reduce the amount of your Social Security spouse's or widow(er)'s benefits by two-thirds of the amount of your government pension. For example, if you receive a monthly public sector pension of \$600, two-thirds of that amount (\$400), must be used to offset your Social Security spouse's or widow(er)'s benefits. If you're eligible for a \$500 widow(er)'s benefit, you'll receive \$100 per month from Social Security (\$500 - \$400 = \$100).

The other is known as the "windfall elimination provision" (WEP). It affects the formula used to compute your retirement or disability benefits if you receive a pension from work not covered by Social Security and if you also worked at other jobs where you paid Social Security taxes long enough to qualify for Social Security

retirement or disability benefits. The formula used to figure your benefit amount is modified, giving you a lower Social Security benefit. Social Security benefits are based on the worker's average monthly earnings adjusted for inflation. When benefits are calculated, earnings are separated into three amounts and multiplied by three different factors. For a worker who turns 62 in the year 2000, the first \$531 of average monthly earnings is multiplied by 90%; the next \$2,671 is multiplied by 32% and the remainder by 15%. Under the windfall elimination provision, the 90% factor would be reduced to 40% unless you have 30 or more years of earnings in a job where you paid Social Security taxes.

For more information on the "Government Pension Offset" or the "Windfall Elimination Provision", you can contact the Social Security Administration toll-free at 800-772-1213 or visit their website at [www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov).

## Retirees Elect Officers

At a meeting this spring, the members of the Federation of Retired Teachers elected the following officers:

President

**Robert F. Doorley**

Vice President

**Robert S. Brennan**

Treasurer

**Ernest A. Guglielmo**

Secretary

**Patricia Houlihan**

Hospitality

**Ida M. Bonde**



Lynette Graham, standing, addresses the Executive Council. Around the table from right to left: Bill Berger, Sandy Mitchell, Dennis Neri, Frank Casey, Marcia Reback John Maguire, Ritn Kerwick Blythe and Colleen Callahan Bielecki.

**Rhode Island Federation  
of Teachers and Health  
Professionals**

**Marcia B. Reback, President**

**Robert F. Casey  
*Field Representative***

**Michael Mullane  
*Field Representative***

**James Parisi  
*Field Representative***

**Diana Casey  
*Staff Representative***

**Diane Thurber  
*Executive Assistant***

**Carol Santangini  
*Staff Assistant***

**Patricia Houlihan  
*Director of COPE Activities***

**Colleen Callahan Bielecki  
*Director of Professional Issues***



***Florian Fischer, lobbyist  
for the Bavarian Teachers  
Union (BLL V), shadowed  
Jim Parisi, RIFTHP Field  
Rep., for two weeks in  
June, learning how the  
legislative process in  
Rhode Island works.***