



The SMITH HILL REPORT

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Maureen Martin Retires



Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals Director of Political Action Maureen Martin retired from the RIFTHP on January 31, 2017. Martin worked for the RIFTHP for 11 years, organizing the endorsement process each election cycle. She also worked on membership mobilization campaigns and served as a member of the RIFTHP team of lobbyists at the Rhode Island State House.

Maureen will continue to serve as Secretary Treasurer of the Rhode Island AFL-CIO after her retirement from the RIFTHP. Said RIFTHP President Frank Flynn: “Maureen was a valuable member of the RIFTHP Staff for over a decade. In addition to her work coordinating our many successful election campaigns, she was instrumental in developing relationships with many community based organizations. Maureen was also the driving force behind the revitalization of the RI Coalition of Labor Union Women. We wish her long, happy, and healthy retirement.”

DeVos Approved on Close Committee Vote

The US Senate Committee on Health Education Labor and Pensions (HELP) voted on a party-line 12-11 vote to move forward the nomination of Betsy DeVos. She is a billionaire heir to the Amway fortune and is a

prominent Voucher and Charter school supporter in her home State of Michigan. The American Federation of Teachers issued the following [statement](#) after the Committee vote.

The full US Senate is scheduled to vote on her nomination early this week. Rhode Island Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, who serves on the HELP Committee, voted against the nominee. Following the vote, he issued the following statement:

"[W]hen this nominee came forward, I held a forum for Rhode Islanders to talk with me about her record and what they want to see in a Secretary for Education. And I want to bring into this committee the voice of Barbara Pellegrino who is a first grade teacher in the Warwick Public Schools. She teaches in the classroom that she learned in. Still in the same chairs because public education is so starved for resources."

Whitehouse continued, *"She is also a recent recipient of the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching. Barbara told me this: 'The students who attend our public school deserve an advocate who will work to strengthen our educational system, not one who wants to destroy it.' Her concerns about this nominee are widely shared by Rhode Islanders, 3,000 of whom have called or written to me. Ninety-nine percent in opposition to this nominee. So I will reflect Rhode Island voices in my vote against her."*

Rhode Island Senator Jack Reed announced his intentions to vote against DeVos. Republicans hold a 52-48 edge in the US Senate. Two Republican Senators, Lisa Murkowski (Alaska) and Susan Collins (Maine) have announced that they will not support DeVos. If the US Senate vote is tied, Vice-President Pence will cast the deciding vote.

Bill Introductions

Municipal Employee Binding Arbitration

[\(H5313 Bennet, House Labor\)](#)

The RIFTHP supports this act which would grant municipal employees the right to binding arbitration on financial issues, in addition to all other issues under the current binding arbitration law. It would also allow existing contract language to continue to apply even after its expiration under certain conditions.

Constitutional Amendment – Line Item Veto

[\(H5332 Lancia, House Finance\)](#)

The RIFTHP opposes this resolution to approve and publish and submit to the electors a proposition to amend the State Constitution granting a line item veto power to the Governor.

Voter Initiative

[\(H5341 Lancia, House Judiciary\)](#)

The RIFTHP opposes this act which would provide a detailed process by which a proponent of a voter

initiative and referendum proposal would present the proposal to the Secretary of State, the General Assembly and the Governor.

Concealed Weapons on School Grounds

([H5345](#) Kazarian, House Judiciary)

([S0187](#) Metts, Senate Judiciary)

The RIFTHP supports these acts which would provide that only peace officers and persons approved by the school authorities for the purposes of educational instruction may carry firearms or other weapons on school grounds.

Adjunct Faculty Medical Insurance

([H5367](#) Jacquard, House Finance)

([S0151](#) Miller, Senate Health and Human Services)

The RIFTHP supports these acts which would provide that adjunct faculty members at any state college or university who teach at least fifty percent (50%) of the hours regularly worked by full-time faculty in an academic semester would be eligible for the same state hospital care and surgical-medical service benefit as other state employees.

Charter School Facilities Funding

([S0142](#) DiPalma, Senate Finance)

The RIFTHP opposes this act which would amend the provisions by which charter public schools apply for state aid for reimbursement of school housing costs and would further amend the calculation method of housing costs under this section.

Teacher Pension Costs – State Share Increase

([S0210](#) DiPalma, Senate Finance)

The RIFTHP supports this act which would gradually increase the state's contribution to the teachers' retirement system, while reducing the municipal contribution, eventually resulting in the contributions being shared equally.

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