
The

SMITH HILL REPORT



PUBLISHED BY THE RHODE ISLAND FEDERATION OF TEACHERS & HEALTH PROFESSIONALS/AFT, AFL-CIO

January 8, 2021

Elections Bring Major Changes to Assembly Composition

The September 2020 Primary Election and November General Election brought about major changes to the composition of the Rhode Island General Assembly. The Senate in particular experienced significant turnover because several incumbents decided to not run for re-election and other incumbents lost their primary election race. While the news coverage on the House side concentrated on the general election loss by Speaker Nicholas Mattiello, there were other changes to the House as a result of 2020 elections.

In the Senate, Tiara Mack beat incumbent Senator Harold Metts in the primary election. Incumbent Adam Satchell, a proud member of the West Warwick Teachers' Alliance, decided not to run for re-election and has been replaced by John Burke, a retired URI employee. Incumbent Donna Nesselbush decided not to run for re-election and has been replaced by Meghan Kallman, a professor (and NEA member) at the University of Massachusetts. Incumbent Betty Crowley lost a primary election to Jonathon Acosta, a PhD student at Brown and member of the recently unionized AFT affiliate Graduate Labor Organization (GLO). Incumbent William Conley lost a primary election to Cynthia Mendes. Incumbent Mark McKenney lost a primary election to Jeanine Calkin, who had previously held that seat. Incumbent Erin Lynch did not run for re-election and was recently appointed to the Rhode Island Supreme Court. She was replaced by Kendra Anderson. Twenty year Senator James Sheehan, a member of the Warwick Teachers Union, did not run for re-election and has been replaced by Alana DiMario, a mental health therapist.

In the House of Representatives, incumbent Moira Walsh lost a primary election to Nathan Biah, a former PTU member who is now Principal at Alvarez High School in Providence. Incumbent Dan McKiernan lost a primary election to David Morales. Incumbent Joe Almeida did not run for re-election and has been replaced by Jose Batista. Incumbent Mario Mendez lost a primary election to Ramon Perez, who had previously held that seat. Incumbent Speaker Nicholas Mattiello lost in the General election to Barbara Ann Fenton-Fung. Incumbent Chris Millea lost a primary election to Brandon Potter. Incumbent long-time Representative Robert Jacquard did not run for re-election and has been replaced by Jacquelyn Baginski. Retired IBEW union leader and incumbent James Jackson lost a general election to Patricia Morgan, who had previously held that seat before leaving it to run for Governor two years ago.

Incumbent Stephen Ucci did not run for re-election and his seat was won by Edward Cardillo, Jr. Incumbent Jack Lyle, a retired school administrator lost a three-way general election to Mary Ann Shallcross Smith who had held the seat several years ago. Incumbent former firefighter Michael Morin did not run for re-election and has been replaced by Steven Lima. Incumbent Raymond Johnston lost a primary election to attorney Leonela Felix. Incumbent Jose Serodio lost a primary race to Brianna Henries. Incumbent Dennis Canario, a retired police officer, did not run for re-election and has been replaced by Michelle McGaw.

Here is a [link](#) to a listing of current Representatives and Senators along with their contact information.

House, Senate Leadership Changes

There is a new Speaker of the House because former Speaker Nicholas Mattiello lost his election in November. Warwick resident K. Joseph Shekarchi, an attorney, was elected Speaker of the House when the General Assembly convened on November 5, 2021. Shekarchi was formerly Majority Leader who had held the position of House Labor Committee Chair prior to his election as Leader. He was first elected in 2012. Shekarchi received 59 votes for Speaker. Three absent Representatives (Diaz, Handy, Fenton-Fung) submitted letters indicating they would have voted for Shekarchi had they been present at the session. Nine Republicans voted for Blake Filippi to be Speaker. Four Representatives (Cassar, Henries, McGaw, Morales) abstained from voting for Speaker.

The new House Majority leader is Chris Blazejewski, a Providence Representative. Blazejewski is an attorney whose wife teaches at Johnston High School. The head of the Republican Caucus remains Minority Leader Blake Filippi, a resident of Block Island first elected in 2014.

The Senate leadership remained unchanged. The Senate President is Dominick Ruggerio, a retired employee of the Laborers International Union who was first elected in 1984. Thirty-one Senators, including all five Republicans, voted for Ruggerio as Senate President. Seven Senators (Acosta, Anderson, Bell, Calkin, Goldin, Mack, Mendes) abstained from voting.

The Majority Leader remains Michael McCaffrey. He is an attorney who resides in Warwick whose wife is a Certified School Nurse Teacher in Warwick. Senator McCaffrey was first elected in 1994. The Minority Leader is still Dennis Algieri, a bank executive from Westerly first elected in 1992. Senator Maryellen Goodwin remains Majority Whip. She has represented Smith Hill in Providence since 1986. Hanna Gallo was elected to be President Pro Tempore. First elected in 1998, Senator Gallo is a Speech Language Pathologist who belongs to the Cranston Teachers' Alliance. Senator Gallo replaces Harold Metts who previously held the Senate President Pro Tempore position.

2021 Session Begins

The Rhode Island General Assembly convened for the 2021 session in unusual fashion reflecting the times we live in. The State House remains closed to visitors. The Senate met in Sapinsley Hall on the Rhode Island College Campus. The House met in Veterans Memorial Auditorium next door to the State House. Both the House and Senate will likely meet at those locations for the foreseeable future.

The 2021 session will continue with the possibility of the public participating in committee hearings remotely. The House and Senate are working on plans to hold meetings and hearings in as safe a manner as possible. The House and Senate will not meet three times per week at the outset of the 2021 session.

Smith Hill Report

For the beginning of the 2021 session, The RIFTHP will publish on a regular weekly basis a written version of the Smith Hill Report. We may also offer in the future short video updates, known as Smith Hill Snapshot, which we initiated in 2020.

Follow Us

The RIFTHP has a twitter account for legislative issues. If you are on twitter, follow us @RIFTHPL.

SIGN UP
NOW!



register to receive the SHR directly, [click here](#).