

AG Candidate Peter Neronha: “There’s More Work to Be Done”

Last week, I had a conversation with Peter Neronha, fourth generation Jamestown native, graduate of North Kingstown High School and US Attorney for Rhode Island as recommended by Senators Jack Reed and Sheldon Whitehouse.

He’s also the only candidate running to replace Peter Kilmartin, our current (and term-limited) attorney general. Our interview lasted 40 minutes, and presented here is a selection of our discussion. For a transcript of our full interview, go to motifri.com/peterneronha.

Why do you want to be attorney general?

I love public service and want to continue. And the other, more significant, part of it is a lot of the work that I was doing as an attorney — I thought I wasn’t finished. There was more work to do on the opioid crisis and around focusing on a criminal justice system that is smart and effective. I just felt there was there was work left to do and that I am relatively well-positioned to do it. Hopefully the voters agree.

How can Rhode Island be smart on crime?

We’ve got to take advantage of the diversion programs that have been set up as part of criminal justice reform. The legislature passed that last year, and the diversion door has to swing open wide enough to get nonviolent young offenders out of the criminal justice system. There are two good reasons to do that. We can get young people on the right path that’s good for them and for us as a society and a state. And it’s also far less expensive than sticking them out of the training school to young adults out of ACI for 30 days or six months on a relatively low level charge. And then on the back end, when people get out of prison we’ve got to get them back into the workforce as quickly as possible.

What would you do in your first six months of office to help alleviate RI’s opioid crisis?

Part of it is talking to young kids and adults, but mostly kids, about making smart choices... Part of the reason to talk to kids about why it’s so important to avoid pills is because of the link between pills and heroin. If you can get a pill on the street for \$30 and a bag of heroin for \$3 to \$5, where do you go? The other message for them was that the pill you think is a real pill is not necessarily a real pill. It looks like Oxy, but it’s fentanyl because dealers are pressing fentanyl, which is incredibly cheap, into a pill that looks like Oxy.

What’s your stance on Kristen’s law? (Note, Kristen’s law is nickname for a recently signed, controversial law that creates a new criminal penalty of up to life in prison for an overdose victim’s dealer. It was introduced by AG Peter Kilmartin.)

To go to the end of the conversation I support it. I would not have supported it in its original form, where a life sentence was mandatory, where there wasn’t a carve-out for the Good Samaritan Law, but I do support it because it’s a good tool to have in the toolbox. The question is, when do you use it? I’d be looking at drug dealers who are in the business of dealing drugs in significant weight — [a drug dealer] who doesn’t have a significant relationship with a person who overdoses and knows, or should

know, that what they're dealing with is likely to cause death. I know a lot of the folks who feel differently than I do about that both in the medical community and in the legislature, and I've had conversations with many of them and respect where they come from and acknowledge why they're there. I think it's a lack of trust in the exercise of discretion by prosecutors, and I understand why that lack of trust exists. I think the response is to demonstrate that we can use our discretion wisely.

It's hard for me to say that we shouldn't give prosecutors a tool that they can use because we don't trust their discretion. When I ask someone to vote for me, I'm asking them to trust me to use my discretion wisely based on my track record.

What's your stance on the Providence Community Safety Act?

There are some segments of the community that distrust law enforcement. You can reject the viewpoint as illegitimate or you could acknowledge it and do everything you can to make it better. I think as U.S. attorney or agent you've got to get your people out in the community and build relationships in good times so you can be relied on in bad times. The Community Safety Act, amended, I think it works for Providence.

You talk a lot about going after public corruption. In what ways can we strengthen our ethics, and what ways will you go after public corruption in RI?

You've got to have a good relationship with law enforcement. So the first thing is that the FBI, the AG, and the US Attorney all have to have a very good relationship with each other. One of the cases we did, Mayor Moreau in Central Falls, was based on a reporter's story and then we followed up and built the case looking backward.

The North Providence [case] came in from a tip from somebody who was aware of the illegal conduct. We followed him up and did that on a covert basis. I think that's part of the bully pulpit. You know I didn't give a lot of press conferences when I was U.S. attorney. But the ones I did I would say six or seven of them were about public corruption. People would say they could kind of see my level of frustration. I think the first thing we did was with North Providence [the three councilman who took bribes]. And then we did Central Falls [where the mayor took bribes]. Speaker Fox who took bribes and then we did Ray Galliston who engaged in corrupt conduct.

By the time I was gone, almost once a year I was having a press conference on exactly the same thing and so the message never really seemed to resonate and there were public officials who are running for re-election, having been convicted of criminal misconduct in the past. In one press conference I referred to it as political corruption amnesia. We certainly think once you've served your time or paid your debt to society, God bless, get back into the workforce and succeed. You only have one chance at being in public service.

Related to public corruption [given the context of sexual harassment and the #MeToo movement], do you feel that sexual harassment is something you should go after and doesn't get enough discussion?

Unless you rise to the level of criminal conduct in which case it has to be a priority, I think that you can set a good example as an agency by training around here between the Justice Department around sexual harassment every single year. We had mandatory training around it every single year, 15 years in the Department of Justice, I went through that training 15 times. I think it sets a good example of the

way that you're trained and it's a priority for your employees. It's a priority on your department. And that can set an example for everyone else.

On your campaign website you talk about championing worker and consumer protections. What kind of worker protections do you want to enshrine and what kind of consumer protections do you want to enshrine?

We have to be concerned about is prevailing wage, where employers are taking advantage of employees. We did a couple of cases when I was an attorney. There was one where the employer was taking advantage of its workers. I'm convinced because they did not speak English. And whether they were undocumented I don't know. But at a minimum they did not speak English and I felt like an employer knew they were easy targets to be taken advantage of and did so.

My last hire is a U.S. attorney was the assistant U.S. attorney in our civil division, but her job was to reach communities about knowing what their rights are, so many people don't know what their rights are. Get out the office, get in front of people and talk about whether you have certain rights around certain issues.

Get in front of people and talk about what you have certain rights around certain issues. You know we have forms about how to make a complaint. You can do it online or get a fax in. Not real effective, right? We would have more of these [complaints] if we had we had forms that weren't only in English. There are folks who don't speak English but whose rights are being violated.

But I think we can improve some of consumer protections laws, they're not as robust as they could be.

Would stuff like Net Neutrality and privacy fall under consumer protections?

That's really another role for the AG here right, as a democratic AG, pushing back against the Trump administration where appropriate on things that Rhode Islanders care about. Like the environment, DACA, net neutrality.

[If elected AG] would you support PVD as a sanctuary city?

State and local law enforcement should go after people who drive violent crime. I don't care if that's a person who is undocumented or a green card holder, or is a citizen. I don't think it makes sense from a policy or resource perspective to spend our time, federally or locally, at a state level, rounding up people who are in this country and are undocumented and are not committing a crime. We don't have the resources to do it. Providence has a maximum strength of 500 police officers. The last time I checked they had 400 police officers. All right, so they don't have enough resources in my view.

Do you support I.C.E.?

Do I think we need to eliminate I.C.E.? No. I thought that a reasonably good job when I was U.S. attorney. There are threats to this country that come in not just from the southwest border but from other places are well. It's going back to that discretion issue again that we talked about earlier. We have these resources. How do we use them and what kind of judgment are we using in using them? I.C.E. and customs border protection are the same people when somebody flies in from the Middle East who is a real threat. The state puts them on a plane sends them right back .

What other ways do you see yourself as AG of RI pushing back against the Trump administration?

If you look at the lawsuits the other democratic AGs have brought against the [Trump administration] the vast majority of I think involve the environment, and all kinds of things like fuel efficiency standards for vehicles, efficiency standards for appliances I mean it's sort of in the weeds a little bit. But the administration is rolling some of those things back.

I don't think we can trust this administration to protect our environment. You know one of the things frankly you know we didn't talk a lot about this but when I was U.S. attorney we'd sued DoT [department of transportation]. DoT had not cleaned a catch basin in Rhode Island in almost a decade. AGs have to step up there and do that kind of work.

Fill Your Weekends with Festivals



Sun's out, festival's out. In Li'l Rhody, there's always something to do outside, and this time of year that means festivals. Big, medium, small, we like 'em all. Here's a quick rundown on some of our favorite ones to check out:

The British are coming! Once if by land, twice if by sea, or ... maybe by car? **The British Motorcar Festival** opens to the public on a Friday night, when roughly 80 classic British vehicles will be tooling about Colt State Park (watch out - they may not all stay on the correct side of the road). Saturday will further the excitement with contests for best vehicle, best British attire, and a ladies hat contest among many others. A perfect occasion to channel your inner Bond. *Jun 8 -9. britishmotorcarfestival.com*

Kick off your foray into summer food fests with the **Bacon and Beer Fest**, a new idea that has grown with remarkable speed. Held at the Steel Yard, which can probably hold millions of people, this is half beerfest, half celebration of porcine goodies, and all tasty. Their creative pairings should definitely have you oinking for more. *The Steel Yard, 27 Sims Ave, PVD, Jun 10.*

If you really — and we mean really — like ice cream, RI Food Fights' **Incredible Ice Cream Throwdown** is the place to be. Featuring sample after sample of sweet creamy delights — from plain ol' vanilla to some pretty crazy concoctions — this Sunday afternoon ice cream fest is quite a treat. Wash it all down with Yacht Club Soda and New Harvest Coffee Roasters' iced coffee while you vote for your

fave. *Jun 15. 150 E Manning St, PVD. Advance ticket purchase recommended.*

Whether you have a sweet tooth or a sweet spot for wine, the Coastal Wine Trail has you covered with their annual **Wine, Cheese and Chocolate** tour, which will have something for every taste bud and a blitz on 14 New England wineries. *Jun 16 and 17. coastalwinetrail.com/events/festival*

For more food-centered fare, **Crave RI** promises to be one of the biggest food-oriented events all year, kicking off CVS' annual Charity Classic. *The Dunkin Donut Center (there will be donuts too), PVD. Jun 21 -22. See separate article on page XXX.*

India Point BBQ and Blues Fest returns to the PVD waterfront to help you feel like you're in the south, with two days of music and lots of ribbing. *Jun 23 - 24. indiapointbbqblues.com*

If you're from RI you know about the Bristol **4th of July Parade**. Purportedly the longest running (er - marching) parade celebrating our independence from monarchy in the country, you likely either flock early to stake out a spot on the route and enjoy the spectacle, or you hightail it in the opposite direction to avoid traffic and crowd-based trauma. This year features not only a parade along brightly colored medians, but also a carnival, performance of Cinderella and many related events throughout Bristol. *Jul 4. fourthofjulybristolri.com*

Wickford Art Festival: This local creative favorite returns with a vengeance! More than 200 artists display their work for you to admire and purchase if you like (tax free, of course). For 56 years, the town of Wickford has hosted this outdoor event celebrating fine art, and boasts a juried selection from over 200 artists — from near and from around the world. Painting, photography, sculpture, fiber and almost any medium you can imagine is represented. *36 Beach St, North Kingstown. Jul 7 - 8. wickfordart.org*

Heritagefest in East Providence will offer visitors a wide range of local music, anchored by Kiss and Beatles tribute bands and featuring many Motif music award winners as well as Rock & Roll Hall of Famer Terry Sylvester, Katie Kleyla, David Tessier All-Star Stars and many more. Food, an art show curated by HeARTs fieldspot Gallery and more entertainment will keep East Providence hopping all weekend. *Pierce Field, 201 Mercer St, East Providence. Jul 13 - 15. fb.com/epheritage*

South County Balloon Festival: Up, up, and awaaaay! Balloon rides are early mornings or early evenings. In between, the URI campus fields host an all-day festival with inflatables, fishing ponds, a kid's train, carnival rides, BBQ vendors, rock climbing, crafts and far more. *Jul 20 - 22. URI Athletic Fields, Rte 138, Kingston. southcountyballoonfest.org*

Warren Quahog Festival: Chowders, clams, quahogs! There are also vendors, arts and crafts, and live entertainment. *Jul 21 - 22. Burrs Hill Park, S. Water St, Warren. portal.clubrunner.ca/4790*

Newport Flower Show: For all aficionados of flowers, horticulture and Martha Stewart (yes, that one will be attending). There's also a special feature on tiny/cottage living straight out of the Gilded Age. *Jun 22 - 24. newportmansions.org*

There will be a festival to accompany the **Blessing of the Fleet** harborside in Narragansett. You don't need to be a nautical fan to enjoy this - though you'll certainly have plenty of company if you are - as food, drink and general sidewalk entertainment will enliven Narragansett. Jul 26 - 28, with champagne bottles shattering on Jul 26, amid a procession of ships vying for "best decorated." Seafood, alcohol, live

music, a carnival and a road race (not against the ships – just against other runners) round out the festivities. *Jul 26 – 28. narragansettlionsclub.org*

34th Annual Charlestown Seafood Festival: Featuring all things edible under the sea, with crafts, adventures, activities, rides and fireworks. *Aug 3 – 5. charlestownrichamber.com/seafoodfestival.html*

Rhode Island International Film Festival: Going strong into its third decade, RIIFF nominates short films for Oscar contention, features celebrity guests and has screenings, among many other things with a cinema verite flavor. *Aug 7 – 12. film-festival.org*

27th Annual CumberlandFest: A classic summer festival with rides, live music, a car show, fried food and fun for everyone in your family. *Diamond Hill Park, 4097 Diamond Hill Rd, Cumberland, Aug 10 – 12. cumberlandfest.org*

A relatively new entry in the festival field, **The Loeff Fest** has taken off with mustachioed impertinence and playful enthusiasm the last couple of years. It's a giant art show, with all of the food and entertainment amenities that come with it, at the old carousel in EP. *11am – 6pm, Crescent Park, 700 Bullocks Point Ave, Riverside. Aug 11. eastprovidencearts.org*

Farm Fresh RI, the non-profit bastion of local produce, holds an annual fest spiced with wine, mixed drinks and breathtaking Newport ocean views, making it a feast for all the senses: both a giant farmers market and a tasting of what chefs can do with those ingredients. *On the lawn of Castle Hill Inn, 590 Ocean Ave, Newport. 5 – 8pm, Aug 14. farmfreshri.org*

Washington County Fair: The big “rural” carnival fair in South County. 4-H, adult games, rides, prizes, live music and so much more. *78 Richmond Townhouse Rd, Richmond. Aug 15 – 19. washingtoncountyfair-ri.com*

New England Quahog Festival and Sea Creature Parade: Starting with a parade of creatures from Narragansett Bay, this beachside festival/fundraiser will have food trucks, live music (including The Copacetics and Superchief Trio), kayaking and a beer garden. *Noon, North Kingstown Town Beach, 10 Beach St, North Kingstown. Aug 26. newenglandquahogfestival.com*

Cultural Fests

Li'l Rhody's a tiny state, but much like Epcot — during the course of the summer you can tour (and drink) your way around the globe. Are you feeling blue after St Patty's Day? June 23 marks the **James McNally Wilson Irish Festival** at the Guild in Pawtucket. Starting at noon, it features an array of Irish/Celtic music, dance and food if you're one of those people who enjoys corned beef and cabbage all year round.

Mosey on over to the Main Street Arts District in Pawtucket for **the Feast of St. Jean Baptiste** at 6pm on June 28, a festival highlighting the centuries-long history of one of **its** tiny but mighty towns.

Meanwhile, on July 21 at noon in Higginson Park in Central Falls, celebrate the **Colombian Independence Day Festival** with food, music and fun straight from South America. Don't forget to check out the Colombian flag raising at 6pm on July 20 at Central Falls City Hall.

On August 12 is the **30th Annual Dominican Music and Cultural Festival** at Roger Williams Park at noon. The Dominican Parade of RI starts 10am at the corner of Thurbers and Broad Streets in PVD.

Over the August 11 weekend is **the Annual Bolivian Festival** at the Alex & Ani Skating Rink, with a procession starting at 2pm from St Patty's Cathedral on Smith Street, for added flavor. And although they don't have festivals attached to them, there are the following flag raisings: July 6 will be the **Venezuelan Independence Day flag raising**, 6pm at the State House. On August 9 at 5pm at the State House is the **Ecuadorian Independence Day Flag raising**. There's a **Puerto Rican Flag** raising on August 14 at 10am at the State House. Quick reminder: Puerto Rico still doesn't have power.

The **Southeast Asian Cultural Festival** takes place in Fall River Heritage State Park at 10am on July 28, uniting the various cultures of southeastern Asia (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia) into one festival with food, drink, crafts, music and plenty of stuff for the kids.

Head on down to Newport's Independence Park on July 13 - 15 for **the Black Ships Festival**. Don't let the name fool you, it's not something pirate-related. Commemorating the end of two centuries of Japanese isolationism and the opening of trade, this cultural fest emphasizes Japanese art and culture. On June 9 and 10, downtown PVD hosts the annual **Day of Portugal Festival**, celebrating all things Luso, featuring food, dance and a WaterFire night. In similar spirit, perhaps the biggest traditional Day of Portugal event in the country takes place in Fall River from June 7 - 10. Documentaries exist about the heritage of this event, with strong ties to the sea and the fishing traditions of the Portuguese community ([fb.com/diadeportugalfallriver](https://www.facebook.com/diadeportugalfallriver))

On June 9 at 10am, the RI Scottish Heritage Society puts on their annual **Rhode Island Scottish Highlands Festival** at the Washington County Fairgrounds in Richmond. There will be food, dancing, bagpipe playing and heavy athletics.

And for our more Mediterranean readers out there, **St Anthony's Feast** has been going strong for 40 years. This year it's June 7 through 10 at St Anthony's Roman Catholic Church, 1413 Mineral Spring Ave, N. Providence. Also keep an eye out for Cranston's traditional St. Mary's Feast, with date and details TBA.

And lastly, **the 91st Annual Greek Festival** returns to Assumption of the Virgin Mary Greek Orthodox Church in Pawtucket Sep 7 - 9. Expect Greek food, dancing, kafenio and an agora marketplace.

If that isn't Greek enough for you, check out the **Hellenic Fest** in Newport. Take in the culture, food, pastries (oh, the pastries), wine, music and dancing and be Greek for a day. Opa! *Jul 20 - 22. St Spyridon Greek Orthodox Church, Newport.*

Getting Car Insurance in Li'l Rhody

If you drive in Li'l Rhody, you gotta have car insurance. In a state that ranks toward the bottom of every best-worst driver list, it's an imperative, and state law. How much it costs depends on your age, gender, marital status, driving record, credit rating and stuff like that. But what if, for whatever reason, you

can't get coverage? Our mass transit is either unreliable or non-existent. In America, a car is required to get from A to Z, home to work, school to child care, etc. So is there a public option for car insurance in RI, a state where the government mandates you have it?

There isn't a public option *per se*, but there is something. It's called the Rhode Island Automobile Insurance Plan, and it's an assigned risk pool. The policies themselves are held and funded by the insurance companies, at no cost to the state government. How much they fund the pool is tied directly to their market share, or how much business they do in RI. The RI Division of Insurance refers to this as the market of last resort, and it's very much meant to be your last resort when getting car insurance.

It's a setup very common across the country, managed and administered by the Automobile Insurance Plans Service Office or AIPSO. AIPSO handles a lot of the residual car insurance market, registering people and pairing them with an insurance company. If you can't find insurance, they'll help you out. They're also headquartered in Johnston. There are some eligibility requirements before you can apply; you have to be able to certify you've tried and been unable to find coverage for a period of 60 days. It also may not be cheaper than a policy received directly through an insurance company, but they will cover you when no one else does.

The policy will last three years; after that companies are required to take you out of the pool and give you a regular policy like everyone else. You can also get out of it within one year if you have a three year clean driving record. And the payment options for a RIAIP are the same as any typical insurance plan. Latest estimates show that up to 15% of all RI drivers are uninsured, and fewer than 2,000 Rhode Islanders actually used RIAIP last year. While that doesn't sound like a lot, it's a number that has slowly climbed higher according to AIPSO's own statistics.

To learn more or seek assistance through this program, call (401) 946-2600 or visit aipso.com/Plan-Sites/Rhode-Island.

What do the Slave Trade and Your Favorite Drink Have in Common?

Rum. No other liquor has stronger connotations of tropical paradises, lofty sea breezes and thanks to certain movie franchises, pirates. Rhode Island even has its own rum brewed by the folks over at Newport Storm, Thomas Tew, named after a swashbuckling pirate of the same name who sailed the seas, allegedly founded an anarchist pirate colony and died fighting Mughals in the Red Sea, all while drinking lots of rum, because that's what pirates *do*, right?

Myth and legend aside, the modest drink of pirates was big business for 18th century Rhode Island. These days our brands are Del's, potholes and corrupt politicians. In the 1700s, our state was known for rum and the slaves we traded for it. RI slave merchants controlled anywhere between 60% and 90% of the American slave trade during the pre and post Revolutionary periods. Most of the traders were based in Newport, with only the town of Bristol surpassing it by century's end.



Rhode Islanders had been slave trading since the late 1600s, but it was the rum that let colonial Lil Rhody compete with the European trading powers. Our special variety of rum was referred to as guinea rum. Dozens of distilleries operated statewide, with the best and biggest making more than 1,000 gallons of rum every week. It was our **biggest export** for a while, with at least half of all manufactured rum being exported elsewhere. Over the course of the entire slave trade, Rhode Island shipped almost 11 million gallons of the stuff to Africa. Slavers would sell the rum to British slave forts in return for African slaves. The slaves would be taken to the Caribbean and exchanged for sugar, molasses and other raw materials needed back in Rhode Island to be made into rum. This trading process from Rhode Island to Africa to the Caribbean back to Rhode Island was known as the triangle trade. You probably learned about it broadly in school, but not that RI had a special place in it.

Rhode Island slavers were so effective they earned the nickname 'rum men' in the Atlantic trade, and the special guinea rum was a highly sought-after commodity. Slaves could be bought using the rum, with prices cited in gallons of rum rather than regular currency prices. Typically, the only other market commodity with that kind of trading power was that old European white boy standby: gold.

Despite a brief interregnum brought by the American Revolution, rum and slave-trading went hand in hand until slave trading was outlawed in the early 19th century, despite the fervent, bellicose complaints of slavers. Rum and slaves brought a huge amount of wealth into Rhode Island. But it was wealth built on the subjugation of an entire race, and the beginnings of a systemic American apartheid system that haunts us to this day. Halfway through the 1700s,, slaves made up at least 10% of the Rhode Island population, a number that outclassed every other New England colony. As much as it tries to hide it, Brown University is named after a member of one of Newport's most prosperous slave traders. When you pour rum and Coke into your glass this warm season, instead of just thinking of some tropical heaven, think of the ghosts of Rhode Island's past in some very dirty business.

To learn more about Rhode Island's involvement in the slave trade, join the Tales of the Slave Trade walking tour in Bristol. It starts at Linden Place, which was owned by the DeWolf family, another prominent RI family involved in the trade. For tickets and times, visit lindenplace.org/slave-trade-walking-tour.

investiGATE – Left in the Dark: Criticism Surging on National Grid

Recent wind and snow storms have left more than 100,000 Rhode Islanders without power already this month. Of the eight highest storms/weather events to knock out power since tracking began xxx years ago, six of them have occurred in the last seven years, and many of them weren't hurricane events. National Grid has come under fire recently by asking for rate hikes; they got one last year, and they're asking for another from the Public Utilities Commission this year.

But not everyone is accepting the hikes. For some, they're simply unaffordable. "There are people in RI who pay 40% of their incomes toward utilities," says **Camilo Viveiros**. He's the lead



coordinator of the **George Wiley Center**, a non-profit, grassroots political advocacy group standing up for the rights of our own dispossessed. Some of those rights are utility rights: to make sure all of us have access to our basic needs of water, light, heat and electricity. As it turns out, Massachusetts and RI both rank in the top five for highest energy costs nationwide.

Part of what the George Wiley Center is pushing for is the **Percentage of Income Payment Plan** (PIPP). Under this plan, if you or your household fall under certain poverty guidelines, the utility provider will only charge you a fixed percentage of your income. Viveiros stresses that it's not radical; it's not even new. Up until the '90s, RI had such a plan in place. "We're a deep blue state," he says. "It's not a left-right issue. Red states, including some where National Grid provides utilities, have these plans." It's true. As of 2014, states as diverse as New Hampshire, Nevada, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Maine all had some version of PIPP.

And it's not like no one has asked them. In June 2017, the George Wiley Center sent a letter to **Tim Horan**, the president and COO of National Grid RI, asking to commit to an income-sensitive plan. Almost three weeks later, the reply came in: "National Grid does not believe the answer is a return to the Percentage Income Payment Plan ("PIPP"). However we are working diligently to develop other programs to help income-eligible customers afford their electric and gas service." In a reply letter, the

George Wiley Center asked what those other programs would be, and National Grid never elaborated.

“If people can’t pay, they can lose their homes, become homeless, have their children taken into DCYF, be sent into nursing homes,” says Viveiros. “It’s a public health crisis.” During 2016, there were more than 20,000 utility shut-offs throughout the state. There could have been more. With their Lifeline Project, in collaboration with the RI Center of Justice, the George Wiley Center sued National Grid and the Department of Public Utilities for shut-offs on “protected” customers. Protected customers are those who need power to their home for a medical condition or machine, without which they could die. As a result of the lawsuit, 7,000 shut-offs were prevented.

Just last month, Representative **Scott Slater**, among others, filed House Bill 7900 to bring a form of PIPP back to Rhode Islanders. It stipulates that if you make certain percentages of the federal poverty level, you only pay a single digit percentage of your annual income for utilities. Federal government assistance toward energy and heating has declined, and the bill is meant to help counteract the decline.

That’s not the only solution to National Grid’s rising rates **and reduced service quality**. One (of many) conceivable options is municipalization. The Providence chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) recently launched a Nationalize Grid campaign. DSA has been around for a while, but its membership exploded after Bernie Sanders’ campaign in the 2016 primaries. “Prices are rising, rent is going up, but wages are still stagnant,” says membership co-ordinator **Dan Quayle**. “We have a lot of people on a fixed income who can’t afford it when National Grid wants to increase their profits.”

DSA envisions a three-step process: Remedy the current problems, buy back or seize the grid and create a system that is accountable to the state it serves, while making citizens a part of the process. They’re also working with the George Wiley Center on utility justice issues. “A publicly owned utility company is possible,” says Viveiros. “It works in a red state like Nebraska, so why can’t it work here?” It’s not widely known, but Nebraska’s government is the only state government that owns its own power company, the Nebraska public power district. It also boasts some of the lowest power costs in the country. Its commissioners aren’t appointed; they’re elected directly by the voters. “When a local government provides these services, like in Pascoag,” says **Will Speck**, DSA member, “they’re cheaper, higher quality with better service.”

Municipalization isn’t a dream for some, but a serious political reality. In the middle of February, Representative **J. Aaron Regunberg** (District 4) filed two bills aimed at National Grid, 2018-H 7661 and 2018-H 7674. “I, like a whole lot of folks, don’t like what we’ve been seeing coming from National Grid,” says Regunberg. “There are rate hikes and reduced services. This is the second time in three months that a storm has knocked power out for people for multiple consecutive days.”

His first bill would create transparency around the ways National Grid uses customers’ money toward advertisements for National Grid itself. The second bill would create a council to investigate just what kind of public option would work best for RI. “It’s our responsibility as a legislature to come up with an alternative model,” says Regunberg. “One that is accountable to our community and not shareholders and CEOs.”

In June, the Department of Public Utilities will have evidentiary hearings about National Grid’s latest proposed rate hike. In August, the DPU will vote on it, and if it passes, it will become effective September 1, just in time for next heating season.

investiGATE: Crumbling RI Schools Affect Student Health

The year started dramatically for some Rhode Islanders. Students in Warwick and Cranston were sent home from school in January thanks to water damage and burst pipes from the cold snap. It's an early sign of a growing crisis in our public schools; many of them are old and even more are falling apart. Governor Gina Raimondo, in her State of the State address last month, pledged \$1 billion to fix our public schools over the next five years. This past September, she released a long-awaited study called the State of Rhode Island Schoolhouses. This report details the \$2.2 billion public schools need, including everything from fixing roofs and ensuring they have clean water and heat to more minor things like fixing and repainting signage. At least \$600 million is needed in immediate repairs to our schools, to make them dry, warm and safe.

This has been a developing crisis everywhere, not just in Lil Rhody. Nationwide, some 50 million students and six million adults use public school buildings every day; that's nearly one-fifth of the nation's population. And if the school building is old or hasn't had renovations to bring it up to safe standards, it can have a detrimental effect on public health and public education. One of the most common problems in public schools is ventilation and air quality. Schools with poor ventilation and that lack access to fresh, clean air will see an increase of 50% to 370% in the incidents of respiratory illness. This directly affects student learning, concentration and in national studies, causes rises in truancy and school suspension rates.

Our students are being treated like canaries in the coal mine. The most common and well-known respiratory illness in RI is asthma. According to data gathered by the RI Department of Health, one in every 10 Rhode Islanders has asthma. For adults, our rates are 33% higher than the national average. When you look at children, the rate is 40% higher than the national average. In a 2014 study on asthma claims in children, it found a direct correlation between asthma rates and student absenteeism. That's when a student misses 10% or more of days in the school year. The study showed that during the time period it surveyed, 18,000 students had an asthma claim. Of that number, 37%, or around 6,700 students, were considered chronically absent during the school year.

It's critical that students and school workers everywhere work in a healthy environment to avoid respiratory illnesses like asthma, which can add up to expensive healthcare costs over a lifetime. It's a huge public health crisis considering just how many people, not just students, but their parents and loved ones, will enter one of these buildings.

Asthma rates are how Lisa Nelson got involved. She's a public schools activist and the founder of Fix Our Schools Now, a coalition dedicated to ensuring a healthy environment for everyone who needs our public school buildings. Lisa works for a healthcare nonprofit, and one day RIDOH's statistics on local asthma rates found its way into Lisa's hands. It sparked her own investigation. "The coalition is meant to be a clearinghouse for all this information," said Lisa during an interview in which she walked me through the public health crisis that is our school buildings. "Before, all the information was in separate departments. It's our mission to bring it all together so we can work as a state toward a solution."

Fix Our Schools Now has been active since 2016. Lisa has collected a staggering amount of sources, information, health experts and state leaders to tackle decaying local schools. In February of last year, Fix Our Schools Now hosted a mini conference of sorts that included health experts from Harvard, an architect familiar with the latest in school building standards and State Treasurer Seth Magaziner among many others. Just a few weeks ago, Fix Our Schools Now took a public tour of Rogers High School, which ranked in the top 10 of worst schools in that State of Rhode Island Schoolhouses survey.

Lisa compiled everything from the conference and the information she's learned and has turned it into a two-hour presentation. She took it on the road to schools, towns, anywhere where anyone was curious or had someone who needed convincing. "How long have we been endangering the health of our students, teachers, janitors, lunch staff and others by neglecting these buildings?" said Lisa. "Going into places like these with bad ventilation or other hazardous materials is toxic for anyone's health, even if you're just visiting."

Fix Our Schools Now isn't as interested in assigning blame as it is finding solutions. This public health crisis in our schools has been bubbling for some time. Capital improvements and repairs for schools are frequently underfunded when compared to national standards. RI only spent 23% compared to the national standard on repairs and new school construction. But it's often an uphill battle. Funding for new school construction requires the towns, many of them often cash-strapped as is, to pay for all new repairs and buildings upfront. The state will pay them back after construction is finished. In a small state like RI, the state government pays for 78% of new construction, compared to the national average of 18%.

But it's not all bad news as 2018 chugs along. Governor Raimondo's pledge and plan for money for new schools and repairs shows our leaders are starting to tackle the issue. It may take a village to raise a child, but it will take a Rhode Island to fix our schools now, and reverse these long-standing trends.

Concerned parents, teachers and others frequently send Fix Our Schools Now tips and pictures of school building conditions across the state. If you'd like to leave a tip, anonymously or otherwise, for Lisa and the rest of the coalition, you can call 401-236-4811.

The Alternative to Comic Con

Rhode Island Comic Con isn't the only comic convention going on this month. On Friday, November 10, Providence Community Library will be hosting Alternative Comic Con at Olneyville Library. Its intent is to be a smaller, more local celebration of the local arts and comic scene in Providence. "It's an event we want to use to bring the community together," says event organizer and library manager Sarah Gluck. "We want to provide access to comic con events and access to the local arts community." The event is free and family friendly. The idea is to offer an option to those who find themselves priced out of RI Comic Con or don't find it family friendly.

This is Alternative Comic Con's second year. Last year it was held at the Mt. Pleasant Branch, as Olneyville had flooded. It was a success, having more than 100 people in attendance, and a similar

turnout is expected this year. The lineup will include favorites like Big Nazo, who will be showing off their creature creations, as well as fellow artists Jeremy Ferris (who created the event's poster), children's book illustrator (and *Motif* contributor) Cathren Housley, and print-maker and Dirt Palace artist Olivia Horvath. Dirt Palace is a feminist collective formed in 2000, when they renovated a then-abandoned library on Olneyville Square by themselves. The collective provides a studio and living space for women artists, striving for a public arts and intersectional presence in Providence.

Providence's own The Boardroom, a collective of board game enthusiasts who run events for people who like to play more than just Monopoly and Clue, has donated a number of games for people to play. People have also been donating comics to the library, so event attendees can get one free comic as long as supplies last. Providence Roller Derby Girls will be rolling in with button making. Providence City Arts for Youth, a community arts organization dedicated to bringing arts to the kids in the city, also will be on hand providing an animation workshop. The Providence Comics Consortium will be offering lessons on screen printing and group drawing. They teach comics and sequential art to kids and teenagers through the Providence library system.

"This event is for people of all ages, and anyone excited about comics," says Gluck. As it's gotten bigger, RI Comic Con has veered away from a local flavor, and begun to price some people out of enjoying it. "We're really grateful for the local arts organizations; we couldn't do it with them. We want to provide an open space and forum for people to celebrate and connect with their local arts community."

Alternative Comic Con will be happening at Olneyville Public Library at 1 Olneyville Square from 2 - 6pm on Friday, November 10.

Barnaby Castle Hosts a Halloween Party



Though everyone may flock to visit Lovecraft's grave or the ghosts of the East Side this Halloween season, there's a hidden gem on Broadway with its own scary stories to tell. Barnaby Castle has graced the West Side since its construction in 1875. It was built in a Victorian style that was eccentric even for its time, with a tower, wondrous stained glass windows and a carriage house in the rear. It was commissioned by Jerthomul Barnaby, the proprietor of a very successful department store in downtown Providence. A Democratic party bigwig, he died in 1889. His wife, however, lived for another two years before being murdered by poisoned whiskey sent via US Mail.

Since the late 1800s, this gem of Broadway has become rundown. But there's been movement toward renovating it back to its former glory. On October 28, the Castle will host **Halloween at the Castle**, its first such party in more than a century. "This isn't your standard fundraiser," says organizer Kaitlyn Frolich. "We want people to get their tickets, have a good time and enjoy the castle." She's hoping to raise enough money to replace and repair the 118 windows on the property. Many of them were custom-made for the building in the 19th century and aren't the kind you can pick up at your local hardware store. The plan is to engage local artisans for the job.

The basic ticket for this one-of-a-kind party gets you in on the ground floor. It includes an open bar and local food from Julians and Laughing Gorilla Catering. Music will be provided by local singer Miss Wensday with a DJ following. A VIP ticket gets you into all three floors, plus the turret, and even more food from Xo Cafe, Nami Sushi and a lot more. Cocktail attire is expected, but costumes are strongly encouraged, as the night will have a costume contest.

"We don't want to see it knocked down and replaced with condos," says Kaitlyn. "The money is going to a local landmark, and will funnel money into local jobs and give the community something it can use and enjoy." She has a background in interior design, and more than seven years in event planning. The renovation for the castle is expected to take some time. Restoring the windows, for example, is estimated to cost more than \$100,000, and the Halloween party should go a long way toward reaching that goal. Once the renovations are complete, the castle is intended to be used as an event space, providing Providence with an elegant reminder of the past.

While Kaitlyn typically schedules private tours for the castle, on rare occasions it does open to the public. This past September during the Doors Open RI Festival, the castle saw more than 1550 members of the public visit. With some luck and some work, the Castle can continue to be an historical treasure for decades to come.

If you're interested in buying tickets for Halloween at the Castle, follow the link: artful.ly/store/events/13537. Follow them on Facebook for information about future events or tours.

Keepin' it Local: Dress Up in Rhody Pride

It's All Hallow's Eve in Li'l Rhody and you feel like it's a little hollowed out. But with a bit of creativity, you can get spooky like a Rhode Islander and show your local pride.

Rhode Island has plenty of local landmarks to choose from that provide fantastic costume inspiration. Get creative! Dress yourself as the Big Blue Bug with pumpkin decorations and fake cobwebs. Choose something like the Superman building or the Towers in Narragansett, but make them as crooked and haunted as a Gothic castle in a Vincent Price movie. Put a local spin on an old horror movie favorite by turning the Creature from the Black Lagoon into the Creature from Narragansett Bay. Dress up as the traditional movie monster, but cover yourself in some of the litter we've all seen disgracing our local beaches, and top it off with a Save the Bay sticker.

Head for the historical because Li'l Rhody has lots of spookiness in its history. Fashion yourself a 19th century outfit and go as Mercy Brown. She was suspected of being a vampire after her death because of misunderstandings about tuberculosis (her grave is in the Baptist Church of Exeter). Take a traditional chicken outfit and throw on some old Rhode Island Reds clothing and go as the old minor league hockey team mascot. Or, if you can dress yourself up as a sailing ship, add some fake flames and go as the burning of the Gaspee or the Palatine Light.

There's always more modern ways of making a statement on Halloween. If you've got some old *Providence Journals* laying around, fashion a costume from them and go as a the ghost of its former greatness pre-buyouts. If you're a zombie fan, consider going as a zombified version of our own HP Lovecraft, recently risen from the dead. And as always, one of the old man's eldritch abominations is always a great way to rep your state; he was Providence, after all.

So you've chosen your costume, what can you do this spooky season to celebrate Halloween the Rhode Island way? Consider (respectfully) visiting the graves of notable spooky figures like accused vampire Mercy Brown or monster man HP Lovecraft. If you're into haunted places, Lil Rhody has a bunch (see motifri.com/wicked-haunted). A lot of the old buildings on the Brown and RISD campuses date back to colonial times, so hopefully they'll offer you the chance to be haunted by something other than snobby college students. The Belcourt Castle over in Newport is said to be one of the most haunted locations in the state. Seaview Terrace, in the same time town, was featured on *Ghost Hunters*, as was Providence City Hall. Or you could always take a drive by the house in Harrisville that the movie *The Conjuring* was based on. Just keep in mind that it's private property — don't trespass and take care not to spook the owners.

There's plenty more around; check our center spread for more in depth coverage!

It's Time to Run ... for Office

It's 2018. You open the news notification on your phone to find President Trump has announced on Twitter that he's persecuting millennials found to be killing traditional industries, the pothole in front of your house hasn't been filled, and Lincoln Chafee's hair is running for governor again under the slogan 'Feel the Chafe.' "That's the last straw!" you say to to yourself. It's time to make a difference and run for office.

Okay but *how*? If you're one of millions of Americans or dozens of Rhode Island Republicans, you want to run for office but you have no idea how. We here at *Motif* are going to provide a broad-strokes version of running for office. Unfortunately, electoral democracy is just a mite more complicated than we can fit in column inches, so please, please — the best resource for specific information on running is your local Board of Canvassers or the secretary of state's office.

First, you can only run for local office if you live in the area the office represents. That means if you want to run for a Providence or Cranston City Council office, you better live in the same neighborhood you're running to represent. Second, make a choice on a party. It's no secret here that we're heavy on

Democrats in Li'l Rhody, so if you join with the Democrats your primary race may be more decisive and tighter than the regular race. And if you're a Republican, well, you'll have enough fellow members to fit in a phone booth. Third: "House of Cards" and "Scandal" show a version of politics heavy on sex and mayhem and low on just how much ungodly paperwork you have to fill in.

To start with, fill out a declaration of candidacy form, have it witnessed by two people and hand it in to your local Board of Canvassers. If you're one of those people brave enough to run for federal office, hand it in at the State Board of Elections. After that, fill out and report campaign finance forms. All candidates are required to report contributions and expenditures and file quarterly reports with the Campaign Finance Office. This is a *highly* important section of running for office, and getting it wrong can get you run up on ethics or criminal charges. Here's the link to the Campaign Finance office where they have everything you need to know: elections.ri.gov/finance

So you know those neighbors you haven't talked to in 10 years? You're about to get very familiar with them as you'll need their signatures if you want to appear on the ballot. These are called nomination papers. How many you need depends on the office you're running for, and again, the people who can sign yours are typically the people who you'll be representing. For your local offices, check with your local board of canvassers because requirements will vary from town to town. The RI General Assembly requires 50 signatures for the House and 100 for the Senate. If you want to run for governor, you'll need 1,000. Anything below that, like lieutenant governor or secretary of state, requires a cool 500. You've only got a couple of weeks to do this; traditionally it happens in July of the year of the election.

And *voila!* Broadly speaking, do the above and you're on the ballot for election day. But it takes a lot more than that to run for office. You should become an active citizen in your community now and get a feel for the issues in your area. Bite the bullet and ask that aunt you never talk to for money — electoral democracy is an expensive habit. I hope you enjoy cardio, too, because you're gonna do a lot of walking to canvass for votes. People will slam the door in your face, but if you've spent any time on Tinder, you're already prepared for rejection. Most importantly, don't be another one of those cookie-cutter candidates who runs for ego and the career, and only pays lip service to local communities and their issues. Margaret Mead once said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it's the only thing that ever has."

And don't take bribes. We keep losing politicians that way.