

# The RI Political Cooperative Is a New Effort to Redefine State Politics

The Rhode Island Political Cooperative (RIPC) is a new statewide political initiative with a progressive agenda, dedicated to challenging the political establishment and forming a new governing majority that will make government work for the people of Rhode Island — not for corporations or the connected. RIPC plans to put forward a slate of 25 or more like-minded Democratic candidates to run for office in 2020 and provide them with the support they need to win.

Matt Brown, Jeanine Calkin and Jennifer Rourke are the co-chairs of the RIPC. Matt Brown served as secretary of state in Rhode Island from 2003 to 2007. Jeanine Calkin served as a state senator serving District 30. Jennifer Rourke has run for state senate in District 29. Both Rourke and Calkin are running for senate under the RIDP banner this year.

I spoke with Brown, Calkin and Rourke by phone for this interview.

**Steve Ahlquist:** Why this early announcement?

**Matt Brown:** Because we want to win all these races, and it takes a lot of work, challenging the establishment and all its corporate money, so one of the ways to win in that case is a lot of hard work. The sooner you start the better.

**SA:** How big are you hoping to get?

**MB:** Massive. We want to win all these races. We want to get a governing majority with these candidates, and that's going to take a big grass roots mobilization. We want to build the biggest grassroots mobilization in the history of the state.

**Jeanine Calkin:** We want to make sure that every one of our candidates has enough resources to win. As far as volunteers go, we're running 25 races, we want to make sure that we have enough volunteers that are going to be able to help support each one of the candidates. We don't want to have any one of our candidates struggling because they don't have volunteers. So if you know anybody who wants to come on board and volunteer with some really great candidates, we want to know about them.

**SA:** Are you going to be involved in the 2019 Monica Huertas election at all?

**JC:** We had not planned on a race in 2019. Because we still are a newer organization, our full capacity is something we're going to be building up over the next year or so.

**Jennifer Rourke:** Her election was actually a surprise for us. But though we were preparing for 2020, we're doing all we can for Monica to ensure she wins.

**SA:** You're mostly running against incumbent Democrats. Can you speak to that?

**MB:** We have this political establishment that's been running things a long time, people still don't have a living wage, we still haven't done a Green New Deal, we still lack affordable housing, and so we need

to replace the government with new people who are going to fight for those things.

**JC:** Under our current system, we're lucky to get even the most minimal of incremental change, and that's not enough. The people of Rhode Island really need our governing leaders to really step things up, and that's what we're hoping to do. We have some great candidates that are really going to push hard for some real bold change. Including things like a livable wage, fair pay and pushing good environmental legislation.

**MB:** Some of these candidates you've probably not come across before and they're just total knockouts. They're going to shake this place up.

**JC:** We are still developing our policy positions, a year out from the election. These are things the candidates all believe in, and that we're all going to be fighting for. These will be made available on our website and during future press conferences and releases.

**SA:** What is the Rhode Island Political Cooperatives' plans regarding the convention you've announced for later in the fall?

**MB:** The idea is to have at that point all or most of our candidates on board, with grassroots members, volunteers, campaign managers — the whole group — and have a big event where we'll put out our policies, we'll talk about organizing and really get ready for the 2020 campaigns.

**SA:** Have you spoken with members of progressive and lefty groups like the Working Families Party and the Rhode Island Progressive Democrats about aligning your goals?

**MB:** Yes, we've talked to some groups and we'll be talking to them all over the coming days and weeks.

**JC:** While other groups do stuff like endorsements and trainings and things like that, we are really working together to not only get everyone elected and make sure they have the resources that they need to run and win, but also to be a support system, so once they get elected, they can work together to get good legislation passed, and potentially kill bad legislation.

But it's also to get a governing majority up at the State House, to potentially make some real changes up there so that the bills that we all believe in have a chance of actually going through.

The 15 candidates announced so far includes Melanie DuPont for Senate District 22, Jeanine Calkin for Senate District 30, Jennifer Rourke for Senate District 29, Cynthia Mendes for Senate District 18, Kendra Anderson for Senate District 31, Jennifer Douglas for Senate District 34, Maggie Kain for Senate District 37, Nicholas Delmenico for House District 27, Zach Colón Warwick City Council Ward 9, Michelle McGaw for House District 71, Tiara Mack for Senate District 6, Monica Huertas for Providence City Council Ward 10, Jonathon Acosta for Senate District 16, Alex Hoffman for Senate District 1 and Jessica Vega for Central Falls City Council Ward 5.

*Steve Ahlquist is the editor and reporter fro UpriseRI.com a progressive news blog.*