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Dear Neighbor,

Two years ago I asked you to send me to Providence to deal constructively with some issues we all knew were troubling the state.

Now, as I ask for your vote again, I have to report that what I found was very discouraging. The culture of the state house and the problems I encountered were far worse than I thought. What follows is a long letter. To those who read it, I hope it will be of value.

You will learn my story, and you will read things that you don't see in the newspaper. I will lay the cards on the table and I will tell you the truth. Not a pretty picture. If, when you're done, you think there's something that I have missed or if there is something else you would like to know, then call me. We will talk and I will answer your questions.

Shortly after I was elected, I was put under intense pressure to support Gordon Fox for re-election as speaker of the house. I had expected some solicitation, but I was surprised by the desperate intensity I was hearing. Having served with four speakers in an earlier career, I thought I knew how the speaker's office worked. I was surprised to learn that some things are very different now.

I knew that Brendan Fogarty worked for the speaker. What I did not know, and what Brendan did not tell me, was that he could do nothing on his own, even in district politics, without approval of the speaker's chief of staff, and that everything had a political price. When I asked Brendan for the favor of stepping aside and allowing me to appoint my own district nominating committee, I viewed him in his capacity as South Kingstown party chair. I did not know that the chief of staff was a political operative who considered everything of value to be under his control.

In my previous time in the legislature, there was never any suggestion that an elected representative would take orders from or negotiate politically with a paid staff member. I was surprised when the chief of staff told me, with Brendan listening, that there was no need for me to talk to Brendan, because Brendan took his orders from him. I was honestly a little embarrassed for Brendan when I heard this. I had thought the question of the district committee could be resolved between the two of us.

By that time, I had already agreed to support Gordon Fox for speaker. I had done this on the advice of friends, and had asked for nothing in return.

I was soon surprised to learn that this was not enough. Much more was going to be expected. I had been operating under the belief that I was working for 14,000 constituents. My compensation was to be \$14,000 a year and the satisfaction of knowing I might have

accomplished something. Nothing else. No title, no special office space, no job for a relative, no legal fees or contracts thrown my way.

I was prepared to work on issues, build trusting relationships, and find consensus in solving problems. What I was not prepared to do was take orders from an unelected staff member, or anyone else for that matter. I soon saw that I had to make that clear, and I did. Though I did not know it at the time, I think my future relationship with the leadership was defined at that moment.

Some of you may or may not agree with my votes, but I can tell you that with regard to the important ones, they are well-informed and thoughtfully considered. In the case of the pension reform bill, I attended every briefing, every conference, every hearing available. I met with the treasurer's staff, and with the treasurer herself. On my own initiative, I developed an amendment which was my perception of what a middle ground compromise would look like.

In my first year, 2011, I supported the overwhelming majority of the bills presented to us. There were two or three notable exceptions. These exceptions were not well-received. Even worse, as I was told later, was my willingness to propose workable alternatives or to stand up and advocate for them. The speaker is accustomed to getting what he wants and does not comfortably tolerate dissent.

As we began our second year, the big agenda item was redistricting. Looking at the final maps, it was clear that the speaker had identified three representatives whom he was determined to prevent from being re-elected. One was Rene Menard, a retired Woonsocket firefighter, who, though lacking a law degree, may be one of the best lawyers in the building. His great uncle was speaker, and Rene has served for 22 years. He cannot be bought, is fearless on the floor, and reads every bill. He finds and points out embarrassing defects in what comes out of committee, and often forces amendments, corrections and delays.

The second was Bob DaSilva, a Pawtucket police officer who lives in East Providence. While he is an imposing man, in many ways he seems just like any other legislator. Anyone can stand up and speak, to voice an opinion, explain a viewpoint. But Bob is different. He has a gift. While Bob is talking, people actually begin to change their minds. This is a threat to the speaker that has caused him embarrassment on a number of occasions. The speaker needed to get rid of these two, not just to take them out of the equation, but to show his power and to set an example. To teach a lesson to other legislators.

The third person on the list of examples, people who had to go, and whose defeat would put fear into others, was me. While I am not happy with the treatment, I am proud and flattered, as a freshman legislator, to be in the company of Rene Menard and Bob DaSilva.

At first the plan to get rid of me was a simple one. Mike Rice had voiced his intent for a rematch with me just hours after the last primary was over. He had lost the primary because he had let down his guard. Now he believed he could do better. It was no secret that he was in communication with the speaker's office and hoped for some key assistance.

When the possibility of a challenge showed itself, I had no problem with it. It's a free country. He was entitled to a rematch.

As the redistricting issue began to be considered in the fall of 2011, it appeared to me that it would have little impact. My district, District 35, had an excess of about 600 residents. The neighboring district, District 34, was lacking about the same number. Federal law required moving the line to balance the population. Since there were no special problems in neighboring districts, the answer was simple. The first map prepared by the consultant reflected that. It moved the line to shift 600 people. I saw Map A, was not surprised, and took on a false sense of security.

In spite of the usual jokes about gerrymandering, the fact is that federal law does not allow moving district lines for the sole purpose of achieving a specific political outcome. Recent Rhode Island history provides an example. In 1982, there was no election for the Rhode Island senate. Incredible but true. A court suspended the election, the senators were held over for half a term, and a special election was held the following June.

This happened because senate leader Rocco Quattrocchi wanted to rid himself of a troublesome young senator, Richard Licht. He instructed the redistricting consultant, Kimball Brace, the same consultant who thirty years later provided this year's redistricting, to design a district which would prevent Licht's return. Licht had the resources for an expensive lawsuit. He sued and he won.

This time the goal was to eliminate me. Mike Rice's candidacy was the vehicle. Mike was a known quantity. He had said he would fully support the speaker. Mike was a good candidate, but he needed a boost. The change of 600 people, in the part of the district where Mike had not done well, just wasn't enough. He needed the kind of redistricting that was intended to bring about a political result.

Brendan Fogarty works for the speaker. You and I, as taxpayers, pay him over \$85,000 a year plus a \$22,000 health care package. He does not come cheap. He has an office in the basement of the state house and a title that belies the fact that most of the representatives have never heard of him.

So when a skilled hand was needed to redesign District 35 to assure Mike Rice's victory in a primary, Brendan was more than available. He did the job, carving out 3,000 people who populated the Wakefield area where Mike had not done well.

Unfortunately, with the cutting-out of a large block of unfriendly voters, Mike's house was also not in the district. No problem, a little zigzag to put Mike's house back in the district took care of that. A masterful job. I think it would be accurate to say that starting around that time or earlier, Brendan's primary responsibility in the speaker's office was making sure I did not come back. If you agree with that outcome, you probably think your tax dollars and mine are being well spent.

As he has done so many times before, the speaker called in the votes of his loyal followers, they went along, and the redistricting bill passed. A special token from our colleagues for DaSilva, Menard, and myself. The hardest part for me was the realization that even if I survived, I had years ahead of me working in a room with people for whom I have such low regard. This was particularly hard when I thought back to my earlier days in politics when the leaders had a different kind of integrity. Their word was gold and they made sure the rest of us learned to treat each other with respect.

The plan to replace me with Mike lasted six or eight weeks and then it began to look as though it wouldn't work. I don't know what role Brendan Fogarty played in making the speaker aware that the plan was weak. But soon the chief of staff, who had made the deal with Mike Rice, was dispatched to knock on Mike's door and tell him the bad news. Mike would not be running. Kathy Fogarty was a stronger candidate. She would run instead. Rice was not happy, but he didn't have much choice.

Kathy Fogarty is a serious candidate. She is smart and she has spent years on the town council. Brendan is a skilled campaign manager. They have put together some credible local endorsements. Her chances of winning are good.

So where is the problem?

The problem is with our speaker and the system he employs. A careful observer of our Rhode Island house would note that our representatives are not so much legislators as electors. What they do is select from among themselves the smartest person in the room to be speaker. Then they sit back and allow the speaker to be a dictator.

There are dissenters, but a program of fear and vindictiveness is designed to minimize their number. The others understand they are expected to go along. And many are able to do this. The representatives who sat at my right and left voted invariably – invariably – with the speaker. I also know that what they think sometimes does not match how they vote. At times this can be hard for them, but there are rewards.

The model of speaker as dictator shows itself in the way the committees operate. A lot of what you see on Capitol TV and in the committee rooms is nothing more than show business. Testimony is taken in front of a camera and sometimes there are questions. There is continuity of testimony but there is little continuity of listening. Members come and go during the meeting. Chair and co-chair seamlessly hand control of the meeting back and forth. But few members hear a continuity of arguments pro and con. They don't bother because it doesn't matter. There is no deliberation. They will not participate in determining the bill's disposition.

Committee rooms have become studios and there are TV cameras all over the building. The one place where there is no camera is the speaker's office when he is talking to a lobbyist. That's where a camera is needed because that's where the deliberation takes place and that's where the decisions are made. Weeks or months after a hearing, bills come back to a committee for a vote. While the hearings may take hours, the meetings

where we vote typically take only a couple of minutes. Once there is a quorum, the votes are called in quick succession, usually with no discussion. None needed. The speaker has made his decision. The members are more than happy to go along. But if the speaker is truly the smartest man in the building, why is there a problem?

The problem is that it does not work. The system that has evolved in the Rhode Island legislature is not a functioning model for problem solving. The legislature is designed to perpetuate itself and its privileges, and to cover up problems.

Consider the facts:

- The economy is bad. We are typically first in and last out of a recession.
- The housing market is bad. People can't move to new opportunities.
- We have the second highest unemployment rate.
- We are consistently rated 50<sup>th</sup> in business friendly environment.
- We are at or near the bottom in percentage funding of our state university.
- The U.S. Public Interest Research Group ranks us 50<sup>th</sup> in the condition of our roads and bridges.
- Our legislative grant program can't account for hundreds of thousands of dollars given to the Institute for Sport at URI. The State Police are investigating.
- The 38 Studios disaster. Fifty million of your tax dollars gone and we're on track to run that number up to over a hundred million.
- And the legislature has not been called into session to take action to cut our losses.

Over the years that all this has been developing, Gordon Fox has moved up from finance committee chair to majority leader to speaker. Under his leadership, our legislature is dysfunctional. One-man rule. Show-business committee hearings. Lack of participation and deliberation. The problem is our speaker and the majority of legislators who will support him in anything he wants to do.

You have a choice in this election. You can vote for someone who has no state pension, no state contracts, no relative working for the state, and who takes orders only from you. Or you can vote for Kathy Fogarty who will be counted on to do whatever the speaker wants because her husband pulls in over \$100,000 of your tax dollars and whose number one job is to keep me out of the legislature and provide the speaker with her vote.

The good news is that there are about twenty house members who want nothing for themselves and who hope to transform the way the house does business. These are the people I look forward to serving with. After the primary, we will count again and see if that number has grown. If it has, the different direction we are looking for may not be too far off.

Thank you for reading this, and thank you for your participation. I know that the decision that all of you make will be a wise one, and I look forward to learning what it is.

*Spencer*