

2010

The Future of the Rhode Island Economy

James C. LeShane

University of Rhode Island, jcleshane@my.uri.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.uri.edu/srhonorsprog>



Part of the [Political Science Commons](#)

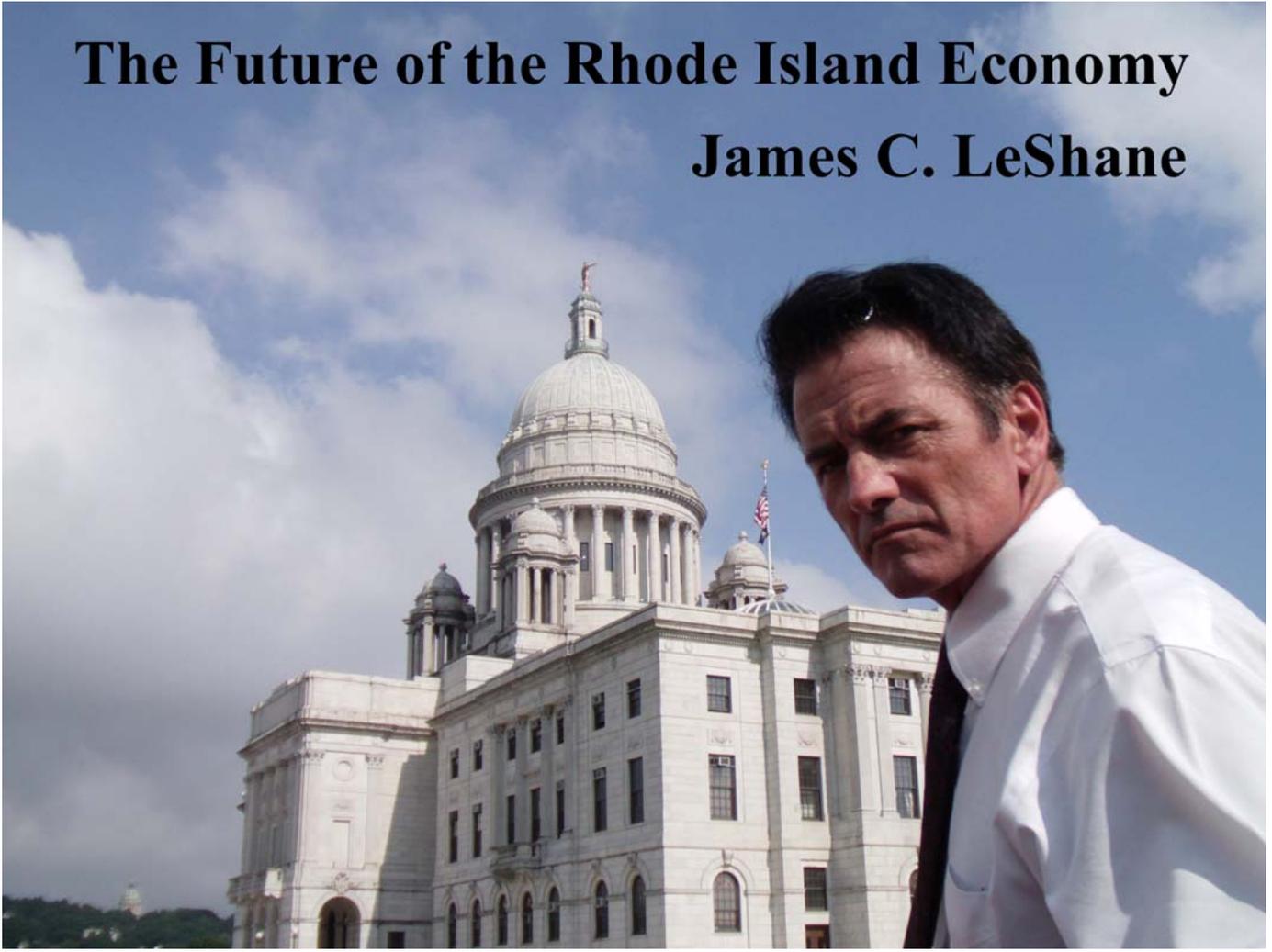
Recommended Citation

LeShane, James C., "The Future of the Rhode Island Economy" (2010). *Senior Honors Projects*. Paper 182.
<http://digitalcommons.uri.edu/srhonorsprog/182><http://digitalcommons.uri.edu/srhonorsprog/182>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors Program at the University of Rhode Island at DigitalCommons@URI. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Honors Projects by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@URI. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@etal.uri.edu.

The Future of the Rhode Island Economy

James C. LeShane



[Click on the picture above to watch the documentary](#)

(Windows users: for best playback quality, [download VLC player](#) here.)

[James C. LeShane, University of Rhode Island](#)

Document Type

Documentary

Contributor

Kristin Johnson, Ph.D., Department of Political Science [advisor]

Date

May 2010

Format Data

MPEG-4 (Windows users: for best playback quality, [download VLC player](#) here.)

Keywords

politics, Rhode Island, election, economy, education, private enterprise

Overview

No one would argue that the economy in the United States has been faltering in recent years; due in part to global factors, and even with stimulus plans offered by the Federal Government, there is increased burden on states to find forms of revenue. More and more, states must compete not only with other states, but also on the global market, for a share of decreasing revenues. Since the decline of manufacturing and a move towards a service economy, states like Rhode Island which in the past depended heavily on the manufacturing sector to provide jobs for its' citizens, have scrambled to find "niche markets" for job growth.

Unfortunately, the aforementioned factors make Rhode Island particularly susceptible to positive and negative swings in the economy. Those upturns and downturns historically exceed national averages in important categories like unemployment. Other factors have worked against Rhode Island as well. Competing interests of a part-time General Assembly and full-time General Officers, like the Governor, as well as competing interests within the House and Senate, have only added to the State's sluggishness in responding to an economic crisis. Add to those factors the unprecedented "Great Flood of 2010", and one has a recipe for disaster.

This study consists of several videotaped interviews that were conducted, during the Summer 2009, Fall 2009 and Spring 2010 semesters, with politicians, educators, and businessmen. Every member of the Rhode Island General Assembly, General Officers, Congressmen, Senators, Vice-President Biden and President Obama were formally invited to participate in short fifteen minute interviews regarding *The Future Of The Rhode Island Economy*. Obviously, not all responded. However, the resulting documentary, as well as the individual interviews, exposes the inner thoughts of those social leaders in a way that is meant to stimulate thoughtful civic participation by the viewer.

Preparation

Prior to the actual taping of the interviews, I was required to document my experience in preparation for the proposed honors project. This included the following:

- Courses
 - COM 100 Communication Fundamentals
 - SOC 100 General Sociology
 - PHL 103 Introduction to Philosophy
 - WRT 104 Writing to Inform and Explain
 - PSY 113 General Psychology
 - MAF 220 Introduction to Marine & Coastal Law
 - ENG 356 Literature and the Law
 - HPR 315 Honors Tutorial PSC/ECN
(International Political Economy)
 - PSC 113 American Politics
 - PSC 116 International Politics
 - PSC 1XX ELECTIVE
 - PSC 288 American Legal System
 - PSC 342 Political Theory: Modern & Contemporary
 - PSC 365 Political Parties and Practical Politics
 - PSC 375 Field Experience Practical Politics
 - PSC 369 Legislative Procedure and Public Policy
 - PSC 471 Constitutional Law
 - PSC 481 Political Science Seminar
- Internships
 - Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights – Investigative Intern
 - Rhode Island General Assembly – Legislative Aide for State Senator Raptakis (D-33)
 - Rhode Island Superior Court – Washington County Clerk’s Office

In addition, because of my age and experience, I had the advantage of an immense set of skills that would be hard to describe in a paper. For instance, I have owned two companies (one a sole proprietorship, and the other a Corporation). I also have close to 20 years of sales experience which has given me skill sets like networking, scheduling and closing. I am confident that these skills played an important part in the success of my project.

Initially, I had envisioned conducting the interviews with the assistance of an URI Film student to perform the technical aspects of the actual filming. No students were available, so my next step involved learning about the filming process before I was able to obtain permission to use the high definition cameras available from the media resource center. This step, in and of itself, was an educational experience in the politics of URI departmental funding and interdisciplinary projects such as mine. Without the guidance of my Honors Advisor, Professor Kristen Johnson, as well as Professor Mary Healey-Jamiel, this all-important first step may have been impossible. Aside from required reading regarding the use of equipment, I had to prepare or secure the following documents:

- Location Release Forms
- Audio / Video / Photo Release Forms
- Question and Response Worksheets
- Introductory Form Letters
- Biographies and Key Committee Assignments
- Rhode Island General Assembly Database
- *Rhode Island Owner's Manual*

Resources

Since my resources were limited, I knew that I would have to rely on interpersonal communication skills as well as personal contacts that I made, first while I was a Legislative Intern for State Senator Raptakis, and then at Governor Carcieri's office when I invited him to visit U.R.I. to address my Legislative Procedure and Public Policy class. The other resources that were required were: telephone, paper, envelopes and stamps. In order to keep my costs to a minimum, I hand delivered the letters to the state house, and I used the following methods to have my invitations delivered:

- Governor's Office
- Director of Communications, Office of the Speaker
- Director of Communications, Office of the President of the Senate
- Direct Mail (White House and Rhode Island U.S. Contingent)
- White House Web Site
- Telephone Contact
- Email

Response Rate

Based on my experience using direct mail and telemarketing when I had my own business, I knew that the typical response rate was between 0.5 to 1.0% using those methods. In order to solicit a higher response rate for my honors project, I combined methods of contact. For instance, after I confirmed that the letters had been delivered to the entire Rhode Island General Assembly, I followed up by calling key administrative assistants at the state house, then I followed up in person. As a result, I received a seventeen percent response rate (even though five percent declined an interview).

Total	132	
No Response	109	83%
Declined Interview	7	5%
Interview	16	12%

Although some lawmakers agreed to be interviewed, but chose not to appear on camera, the following individuals, listed in alphabetical order, were kind enough to grant a videotaped interview and thus contributed to the success of my project:

- Craig Altmeyer, General Manager – Safe Home Security Systems, Inc.
- Brandon Brown, Member - Rhode Island Board of Governors for Higher Education
- Betsy Dennigan, Former RI State Representative & Candidate for U.S. Congress
- Robert Carothers, President Emeritus – University of Rhode Island
- Frank Ciccone, Rhode Island State Senator (District 7)
- Frank DeVall, Rhode Island State Senator (District 18)
- Louis DiPalma, Rhode Island State Senator (District 12)
- David Dooley, President – University of Rhode Island
- John Edwards, Rhode Island State Representative (District 70)
- Jack Reed, United States Senator - Rhode Island (District 2)
- Michael Rice, Rhode Island State Representative (District 35)
- John Tassoni, Rhode Island State Senator (District 22)

Interview Questions

The primary procedure for data collection will be short personal interviews with members of the Rhode Island General Assembly. In addition, leaders from the federal, business and education communities will be interviewed in order to create a “real-life” view, not only of the current state of the Rhode Island economy, but of the future for the Ocean State. Questions were purposely left open-ended, and every effort will be made to allow for the widest possible range of answers, so as not to “pre-categorize” or shape the results by limiting the range of possible responses. Standardization of responses would be a detriment to the purpose of the study. In order to maintain structure and impartiality, all of the participants were asked the same basic set of questions. Obviously, depending on their answers, follow-up questions were asked. Each of the participants was asked the following questions:

- A. Any discussion about the “Future of the Rhode Island Economy” has to begin with an assessment of the present state of affairs, so we’ll begin with the negatives, and then discuss the positives. Let’s assume that unemployment is a symptom, and not a cause of, a downturn in an economy. If you had to choose one factor that is hurting the Rhode Island economy today, what would you say is the greatest contributing factor, and why?
 - a. What sector would you say is being affected most by (contributing factor)?
 - b. Are there any examples from your district that you would like to point out?
- B. Now, let’s turn things around and take a look at the positives. If you had to choose one thing that is a positive in the Rhode Island economy today, what would you say is the greatest contributing factor, and why?
 - a. What sector would you say is helped most by (contributing factor)?
 - b. Are there any examples from your district that you would like to point out?

- C. In your own opinion, where should the state focus its efforts in order to attract new businesses to Rhode Island in order to strengthen our future economy?
- What sectors should we be looking at?
 - What kinds of incentives can we use to attract (new businesses/sectors), and then, to encourage growth?
 - What can we do to promote future growth in the sectors that currently exist in Rhode Island?
- D. Since I am an alumnus of CCRI, and a (very) senior honors student at URI, I would be neglectful if I didn't ask this next question; What do you see as being the role of Rhode Island's institutes of higher education (CCRI, RIC, and URI) in the future of Rhode Island economy?
- What would you say is the best way to encourage the cooperation between Rhode Island's institutions of higher education and private enterprise to promote growth in the sectors you mentioned before?
 - What steps do you think the state should take to promote research, here in Rhode Island, into areas that could actually create whole new sectors that don't exist today?
 - What do you think about the proposed "Technology Park" at URI?
- E. Since I am a disabled veteran, and I had the honor to serve in the Military Police with 119'th MP Company of the Rhode Island Army National Guard, I would also be neglectful if I didn't ask the next question. At some point in the future, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq will end, and our troops will come home, hopefully for good. What steps can we take to insure their reintegration back into the Rhode Island economy, and equally as important, back into society as happy, productive, and contributing participants?

[Watch the documentary](#)

(Windows users: for best playback quality, [download VLC player](#) here.)

To obtain complete individual interviews, contact [James C. LeShane](#).

Conclusions

All of the participants, including those who chose not to be interviewed on camera, gave thoughtful, yet not just carefully worded, answers to the questions posed. One need only view the individual interviews and the fact that each of the participants is passionate about the Ocean State becomes obvious. Each participant provided insights that are not easily obtained by reading a newspaper article or by digesting a sound byte on the six o'clock news. Rather, the viewer of these interviews may be pleasantly surprised by the candor and alert observations made by the participants. Several innovative ideas were presented, and it is my sincere hope that this study will spark more, and vigorous, participation in the political process. There can be no doubt that all Rhode Islanders share the responsibility for [*the Future of the Rhode Island Economy*](#).



James C. LeShane & U.S. Senator Jack Reed (D-RI)
URI Honors Department - Lippitt Hall Auditorium
May 2009



James C. LeShane and RI Governor Donald Carcieri (R)
URI Honors Department - Lippitt Hall Auditorium
December 9, 2008