

## AMHERST BULLETIN

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## EDITORIAL

## Self-interest hardly in Olver game plan

U.S. Rep. John W. Olver, D-Amherst, has been in countless news stories over the years, in this paper and others, but it's a safe bet that a Feb. 6 report in the Washington Post may have been the first to connect this subject and his name: "Congressional earmarks sometimes used to fund projects near lawmakers' properties," the headline read.

The story, produced by a team of three reporters, said that the paper had investigated instances in which lawmakers secured federal money for projects within two miles of residential or commercial properties they or their family members owned. Earmarks are the requests lawmakers tuck into spending bills to fund projects in their home districts.

The paper said it found 33 lawmakers who — while they had done nothing illegal — had engaged in practices that raised questions as to whether they'd benefitted financially from the projects they'd helped fund.

It turned out that John Olver lives just a half-mile from the road reconstruction project for West Street (Route 116) near Atkins Corner — a project for which the congressman won earmarks totaling \$5.1 million.

This was probably not news to many around here.

Olver does indeed live at 1333 West St., and has, in fact, for years. Lots of people know that. He's in the phone book.

And, for about 20 years or so, Amherst officials and regional planners have been holding public hearings, submitting reports and drafting plans to reduce traffic tie-ups and car accidents at Atkins Corner.

It's been a long, slow, tedious process, as these things usually are, and no one along the way, as far as we know, ever suggested Olver would personally benefit from the roadway improvement.

He didn't initiate the project — Amherst officials did — and

wasn't involved in the design. Nor is the completed project likely to have much effect on property values of the nearby homes, Olver's included, in an area where much of the surrounding land is protected from development.

What happened here is that Olver got ensnared in the political controversies around earmarks. Increasingly over the years, earmarks have developed a reputation — well earned in some cases — as a convenient way for legislators to reward donors and constituents and to fund useless boondoggles. The infamous "Bridge to Nowhere" in Alaska comes to mind.

Adding to the whiff of scandal, as the Post noted, is that decisions about earmarks are "made behind closed doors in committee rooms and rarely debated on the floor of the House or Senate." To be sure, that sounds bad, very bad, though we're not sure the full House and Senate need to debate the traffic patterns at Atkins Corner.

In an interview with the Gazette, Olver, while acknowledging that some earmarks are a misuse of taxpayer money, argued that many projects paid for with earmarks are worthwhile. Without them, he said, small projects in "small communities would be at the mercy of big areas." Without them, he said, numerous small transportation projects that have been funded in places like Greenfield, Holyoke, Pittsfield and Westfield, for example, wouldn't have happened.

Olver has been in Congress since 1991 and is now serving his last year. During his time in office, some of his constituents and the media outlets that cover him have questioned or disagreed with positions he's taken.

That's all fair game. But there's no evidence that his use of earmarks to support the project involving West Street in Amherst was anything other than a lawmaker doing his job. In this case, there's no there there.

My good friend, Throckmorton, informs me that the present version of creation is the Creator's 4,853,217th attempt at producing an amusing world. Usually, in previous versions, the whole works rapidly became cosmically boring. The Divinity yawned and instantly erased the mess. This time, at the (mischievous?) suggestion of an angel, the Heavenly CEO decided it might work to enhance the visual effects by coloring the humans differently and prompting them to express their beliefs in the Creator in different ways by means of different religions.

We have not disappointed. Not only have we had wars galore over different religious doctrines, keeping the Divinity up to all hours changing the channels to watch the slaughter, but as an unexpected bonus humans have taken the hue differences seriously. As if they mean something. Not all color differences. We don't subjugate folks on the basis of eye color. But skin color? Now you're talking.

Little did Old Omniscience realize that combining skin color with money and greed would make for so much absurdity. But once you have greed and can make money by declaring one group as less deserving than another, combined with an immediately visible color difference, it takes little imagination to come up with a handy-dandy method for producing oppressed classes who must work harder for less pay. The oppression gets a cover story about the folks of some color being universally, inherently, say even genetically, inferior and therefore deserving

## A SIDEWAYS GLANCE



By RICHARD S. BOGARTZ

of the profit-motivated mistreatment. The best story version, the one that has the Creator laughing uncontrollably (see Wikipedia on earthquakes and tsunamis), is when the profiteers try to support the cover story with religious doctrine. The Creator looks in the Heavenly Mirror in awe at the source of such comic creativity.

With generations of oppression, some folks became more and more convinced of the truth of the phony story and, as good citizens, felt it was their civic duty to forcefully advocate the truth. They, combined with those who know that the whole race business is really about money, are your friendly neighborhood racists.

The false charges of intrinsic inferiority are not enough. To keep the Creator fascinated, the racists of today have the doctrine of laziness. With a system in place that hires the downtrodden last and fires them first, an educational system that funds schools with property taxes, producing poorer schools for the poor, and therefore generations with less skills, and an economic system that when it is functioning at its best has the built-in expectation that one in 20 people

wanting work will be unemployed, the racist points to the prevalence of unemployment in the target group and accuses them of not wanting to work.

This provides the basis for attacks on food stamps, unemployment insurance, government aid to schools, public higher education, Planned Parenthood and any other attempts to ameliorate the situation of the oppressed, on the grounds that if the oppressed want things better they should go out and get a job like "hard-working Americans."

Throckmorton insists that science is the window into the mind of the Divine. He says it is not surprising science has revealed the whole notion of race is without merit. There is no such thing. We are all Homo sapiens sapiens, i.e. the subspecies of Homo sapiens that includes all modern humans.

The Human Genome Project states "People who have lived in the same geographic region for many generations may have some alleles in common, but no allele will be found in all members of one population and in no members of any other."

Genetic research indicates that skin color can change over as few as 100 generations, given the influence of the environment. [Krulwich, Robert (2009-02-02). "Your Family May Once Have Been A Different Color". Morning Edition, National Public Radio.]

It is all just some reckless scripting by the Creator that has gotten way out of hand.

Richard S. Bogartz is a psychology professor at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

## Weighing what matters

By POLLY INGRAHAM

## GUEST COLUMN

With days filled with lists of things to do and struggles for achievements of one kind or another, how are we to know what is "essential" and what is "inessential?" The time of Lent brings a question like this forward. It's been sitting there quietly all along, of course, but now the season escorts it gently up to the front of the room so that we might get a good look at it.

My husband — a clergyman and a deep thinker by nature — recently spent a day at a favorite destination: The Society of Saint John the Evangelist, an Episcopal monastery in Cambridge, right on the Charles River. He took me there before we were married, and it was like no place I had ever been: ancient traditions holding steady against the relentless push of modernity.

He brought home a simple rectangular card with a picture of a cross on one side and several paragraphs entitled "Lenten Traditions" on the other. The first section says:

"Fasting  
This Lent let go of the inessential to hold fast to what is essential. If you abstain from food, ask what you hunger for. Or fast from speed to embrace slowness; fast from indifference to awaken to wonder."

The usual definition of fasting is

considerably broadened here; it's really more about shedding old, tired habits for ones that are more nourishing.

For me, reading this card was particularly timely because I have just accepted a new teaching position at a school that is called "Essential." North Central Essential Charter School in Fitchburg abides by 10 Common Principles (of the Coalition of Essential Schools) that arose after much study of what makes a high school actually work. Students are actively using their minds; they are expected to "design and create and build." There is an emphasis on promoting interdisciplinary intellectual achievement, in a climate of really knowing each student, rather than just covering the material. I will be eager to see if my colleagues and I really can "hold fast to what is essential" in education and recognize when the "inessential" — perhaps in the form of too many dead-end answers or too much busy work — is still taking up too much space.

And then the word pops up in unexpected places, too. There's a store in Northampton that sells tableware, lovely sheets of paper, pretty things from France, a special line of books, children's toys. I even saw a book called "The Perfect Apron." The store is called Essentials. Writing a review

on a website, one customer admits to being perfectly aware that the brightly colored things are all unnecessary, but says, "I walk into that store and don't know how I can live my life without them."

In expressing this sentiment, she has something in common with Shakespeare's King Lear: When his cruel daughters persist in questioning his "need" for knights and servants to attend him (Act II, Scene 4), he objects angrily with: "O, reason not the need." Indeed, what kind of a life would we all have if we eliminated most everything that brought us extra pleasure?

I like to think of Lent not as a time of deprivation, but as a time of re-clarification. Keeping my mind on what makes an "essential" thing, I plan to choose activities that will enable me to go deeper or higher in some way. Instead of doing yet another errand, for instance, I'll seek time for fuller conversations with people — starting with my own family members. I will look honestly at what I do that might seem like service (being on a committee, perhaps) and what I can do to really be of service (visiting someone who is lonely). And, if a brightly colored thing happens to make my heart leap, or perhaps someone else's, I will allow myself to see its value and embrace it.

Polly Ingraham lives in Shutesbury. She writes a blog that can be found at [www.pastorswifefblog.com](http://www.pastorswifefblog.com).

## Solar figures explained

To the Bulletin:

The Feb. 17 Bulletin article concerning the Amherst landfill solar project states that the project "could generate up to 4.75 megawatts of power, annually." Use of the word "annually" implies that 4.75 megawatts is the expected annual output of the solar array, which it is not. 4.7 megawatts is the expected rate of energy production of the solar array when it is pointed directly at the sun on a clear day. It is simply the manufacturer's rated power output of each solar panel (230 watts) multiplied by the number of panels (20,664).

An estimation of annual electrical energy production of the solar plant appears on Page 40 of the Blue Wave proposal. It is 5,995 megawatt-hours per year (or about 6 million kilowatt-hours per year).

Using figures from the U.S. Energy Information Agency, this is approximately the amount of electrical energy

required to supply the needs of 600 average households for a year.

Vernon Turner  
Amherst

## Contraception column praised

To the Bulletin:

Thank you for running the guest column by Angeline Shenje Peyton (Bulletin, Feb. 24) suggesting that President Obama be allowed some slack in the U.S. contraceptive debate.

It was a pleasure to see a level-headed, intelligent rebuttal of an opposing article that coolly stuck to facts with no hint of animosity. Peyton's recommendation that we face reality, and also allow our president to do so, is very refreshing.

As for the very substantial analysis she puts forth, I say it deserves tens of thousands of hits on some outlet such as Facebook.

Joseph J. Vesely  
Deerfield

## LETTERS

## Two votes for Ely for library post

To the Bulletin:

As long-time members of the Board of the Friends of the Jones Library System, we were delighted to learn that Tamsun Ely is running for a three-year term on the Library Board of Trustees in the April 3 Amherst election.

Now retired, she had a 38-year career as a librarian, 33 of those as head of the Springfield Technical Community College Library. She is familiar with library governance and is skillful in public relations. As the Friends Board continues to work on the use of the half-million dollar bequest left it by the Woodbury estate, Ely will be helpful in improving relations between the Board and the Trustees.

If you don't already know her, we believe that she will convince you in her presentation on the League of Women Voters Candidates Night.

George and Ellen Goodwin  
Amherst

## Asian students left out of statistics

To the Bulletin:

As a 2007 graduate of the Amherst Regional public schools I follow with interest many of the school-related stories featured in the Bulletin. I find that I am confused though by the recent reports of the studies on racial disparities in achievement at the high school and discipline at the middle school. The newspaper reported results for students of African-American, Hispanic and white heritage. Was I the last Asian-Ameri-

can to attend the Amherst Public Schools?

Hira Byrne  
Amherst

## A jarring disappearance

To the Bulletin:

Last Sunday my children and I walked the Julius Lester Trail in Mill River, in part to see the mottled grey-green birch tree along the route that was our favorite. Having walked the trail many times before, the kids had named this singular tree and had written a song about it. We arrived to find that the tree had been unceremoniously cut down, the stump seemingly removed. A couple of its branches that had been intertwined with a neighboring tree remained, having been hastily sawed off with a handsaw. As far as I know, this was the only tree of its kind on this public nature trail, and so I'm sure it is quite memorable to walkers of the trail. It would seem someone has taken it for their own. Does anyone know this tree, or its whereabouts?

Richard Beaudoin  
Amherst

## Amherst Club thanks supporters

To the Bulletin:

We would like to thank the Amherst community for its strong support of The Amherst Club's 2012 Love Notes concert held Feb. 19, at Buckley Recital Hall at Amherst College.

Nearly 100 members of the larger Amherst community — including 64 members of the club — worked

on preparations for what turned out to be an overflow crowd and the club raised over \$16,000 to meet the urgent needs of local educational and social service organizations who applied for support: Amherst Family Center, Amherst Senior Center, Amherst Survival Center, Center for New Americans, Family Outreach of Amherst, Greenfield Community College Foundation, Hampshire Health Connect, Jones Library ESL Center, Safe Passage, Tapestry Health, The Literary Project, and Youth Action Coalition.

Amherst ranks fourth in the commonwealth in the level of poverty and there is much work to be done for the thousands of people in our town who live on \$12,000 a year or less.

This year we are especially grateful to President Carolyn Martin of Amherst College for providing the facilities for this benefit work to our 28 advertisers and sponsors, especially PeoplesBank and TigerPress, to the local businesses that contributed food and beverage for the post-concert party and gift certificates for the silent auction and to the many local musicians who shared their talents and Norton Juster for reading from his latest book.

Supplying assistance to our neighbors in need has never been stronger nor more urgent, and we are grateful for the widespread community support.

Arthur Kinney  
Carolyn Holstein  
Jacqueline Price

Arthur Kinney is president of The Amherst Club and Carolyn Holstein and Jacqueline Price were co-chairs of the event.

## EDITORIAL SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

The deadline for letters in the March 9 Bulletin will be 9 a.m. on Monday, March 12. If you have a comment on something you've read in the Bulletin, send an email to [dscherban@gazettenet.com](mailto:dscherban@gazettenet.com), or fax to 549-8181 or by post to Letters, Amherst Bulletin, 9 East Pleasant St., Amherst, MA 01002.

Be sure to include your name, address and daytime phone number for verification.

Letters should be no more than 400 words, and columns should be no more than 650.

Emailed cartoons should be a minimum of 200 dpi, or 8.5-inches by 11 inches if mailed.

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