

EX ALDERMAN NEWSLETTER 66

October 24, 2012

By John Hoffmann

THE NEW SOCIALIST REPUBLICAN AND DALTON WAY: It used to be good Republicans would say government should not be providing services that citizens can easily provide for themselves. Town and Country government with overall deficit budgets this year and next apparently is saying to hell with that theory.

Subsidizing Trash Haulers...THE BIG LIE ABOUT BRANCH CHIPPING: In this year's budget the city had originally put in \$50,000 for "branching chipping/" They knew damn well that would not pay for branch chipping, a service that was last offered in 2008 and cut out of budgets due to revenue shortfalls. In 2008 branch chipping ran around \$80,000.

This year the city put aside \$40,000 to pay for it. By late spring/early summer it was clear the money for actual branch chipping was not available. So Tim Welby of the Public Works Commission, along with Craig Wilder, Public Works director and Mayor Jon Dalton got out the smoke and mirrors. They will be spending less than \$40,000 for what on the city's website and in the latest newsletter was still called "Fall Branch Chipping."

Here is what the program **is and isn't**: **It is not like in years past** where a contractor will drive around town with a large wood chipper and dispose of tree branches and limbs left at the curbside.

It is the city paying your trash hauler for November pick up of lawn waste which can include leaves and sticks put in paper bags or tied up small bundles of sticks depending on your trash hauler.

This service is offered year round by your trash hauler. It is something any resident can easily obtain for themselves. Actual real branch chipping is not a usual service and is a good example of a sensible city service.

Instead of admitting that it still can't afford branch chipping *the city is providing something completely different but labeling it branch chipping.*

CHESTERFIELD ANNOUNCED ITS SEWER LATERAL PROGRAM A GREAT SUCCESS. TOWN AND COUNTRY STILL REFUSES TO LET HOMEOWNERS VOTE FOR SUCH A PROGRAM. Only Town and Country and Ladue don't provide a sewer lateral insurance program in West County. A sewer lateral insurance program has St. Louis County take \$28 a year with your property tax payment. That money is forwarded to the city and an insurance fund is established that pays up to a specific amount in case your sewer line collapses or is otherwise breached.

The Board of Aldermen doesn't decide to have a sewer lateral program. The residents do. They vote on it. The catch is the Board of Aldermen has to put the matter on the ballot and the Town and Country board of aldermen don't want to give the residents the ability to choose for themselves.

I was at a recent Chesterfield City Council meeting where they voted to continue a contract with a service provider to their sewer lateral insurance program.

City Administrator Mike Herring called the Chesterfield program "A great success." and a "Success beyond our wildest imagination."

The first two years of the Chesterfield program they had to borrow money from the city surplus to fund it. But for the next 18 years it has shown a profit each year, currently has a reserve of over \$400,000. The city pays out on between 250 and 300 claims a year and will pay up to \$15,000 per incident for the repairs.

In 2009 as an alderman I introduce a bill to put the sewer lateral insurance on the ballot in April of 2010 for Town and Country residents. The Board of Aldermen refused to do so.

Alderman Phil Behnen said the Finance Committee discussed the matter and thought sewer collapses were something that the homeowner could afford. Members of the finance commission are apparently not hurting for money, living a fixed income retirement budgets or sending a couple of kids to college. One member told me that my bill was never presented for comment to the commission, the discussion about sewer laterals was a number of years before 2009.

I think it would be nice if this current Board would at least let the residents decide if there should be a sewer lateral program. It seems unfair that 95-percent of St. Louis County homeowners have sewer lateral insurance coverage and the homeowners in Town and country don't.

THE GREEN TEAM...LOOKING TO FORM A HONEYSUCKLE STRIKE FORCE: I

attended the October meeting of the Green team Commission. Principia/Christian Science tree hugger Dirk Maas is still one-man show of the Green Team with Alderman Jon Benigas and Public Works Director Craig Wilde in attendance to rein in some of Dirk crazier ideas, like the city renting out possibly dangerous tools to remove honeysuckle.

Honeysuckle was still on Dirks mind in October as he was trying to organize an army of volunteers to attack honeysuckle in the parks. While volunteers are nice, I think contractors with large equipment might be a little more efficient.

Dirk wants to get between 10-and-20 people to go after Honeysuckle with a city employee using a chain saw in Longview Park. He best be careful since the Wheatfield subdivision has an agreement with the city to leave honeysuckle in place along the Park's border with the subdivision as a sound and view barrier.

But after clearing the center of park of honeysuckle two years ago under the direction of Matt Broderick our former parks worker, it has returned, so there should be plenty of the enemy for Maas to attack.

Everyone on the Green Team was going through their Blackberry calendars announcing what would be a good date or a bad date for them to the point no one could decide on a good date. Craig Wilde then brought things under control by telling them not to worry about who can and can't make it. They needed to pick a date and choose a time in the late morning or early afternoon as it would not be too cold and go with it. When I left the meeting they still did not have a concrete date set, but it seemed to be the first weekend in November.

MAKE ME LAUGH: Maas announced that there seemed to be no interest from the members of the Conservation Commission to join his Honeysuckle foot soldiers. He then asked Benigas, "What does the Conservation Commission actually do?"

Benigas paused and then said, "That's a very good question. I really don't know."

He went on to say how the Commission for a number of years without any instructions from the mayor or aldermen, were advocates for the deer. "They were for saving the deer and probably for saving the honeysuckle," Benigas commented.

STORY CHANGES FROM FINANCE MEETING TO BOARD OF ALDERMAN

MEETING: In early October, City Finance Director Betty Cotner broke down the 2013 budget for the Finance commission. In attendance at the meeting was city administrator. John Copeland.

As we reported at the Finance Commission meeting, Cotner rather loudly and clearly told the committee that the overall budget with the \$2.4 million deficit include the general fund with a \$28,000 surplus but that did not include any employee raises. A couple of members asked how they could consider approving a budget without the final salary information. John Copeland then said that would be taken care of later on.



Finance director Betty Cotner left rear at the October Finance Commission telling everyone that the budget did not include employee raises.

Imagine my surprise when Cotner presented the exactly same budget to the Aldermen at the work session meeting on Monday. Nothing had changed, except Copeland now said a 1-percent pay raise for employees was included in the budget.

My question is...why didn't Copeland or Cotner know that two weeks ago at the Finance Commission meeting?

ANOTHER CURVE BALL: Dalton always likes to brag how large the budget surplus (which has been sinking now for a couple of years) is. He would claim that the reserve was eight-times larger than it was required. In reality that standard for a surplus was just 25% of the General Fund portion of the budget. Common sense tells you that you should have one-half year to a full year surplus on hand. Cotner poked a pin in Dalton's "eight times more than needed" balloon by saying that the Finance Commission recommended that the budget surplus be changed from a quarter-year surplus to a half-year. Now he can only brag the surplus is four-times larger than the recommended minimum (and of course sinking.)



Mayor Dalton (right) gets City Administrator John Copeland's attention after the finance director announced the minimum city reserve has been raised.

After Cotner made this statement Dalton immediately asked rather defensively why there was a change. (Of course Dalton might know if he would just attend a finance Commission meeting, where he has a seat that is almost always vacant.)

As Cotner was explaining the Finance Commission felt that under new state rules concerning increasing property taxes meaning that Town and Country could not put a property tax in effect for at least two years since we currently have a "zero" tax rate there should be at least a half-year surplus in the General Fund.

Dalton had motioned Copeland to his side for whispered comments while Cotner explained.

HAT IN HAND: David Lowell Peek, the conductor and music conductor of the Town & Country Symphony was also at the work session asking for money. In past years when money was flowing into the city coffers from Wal-Mart sales tax the city would hand out up to \$20,000 to the off-note musical group. They have not received any funds since 2009. Peek, asked for money and handed out a brochure on the symphony to the aldermen.



T&C Symphony director David Lowell Peek returns to his seat after begging for money in the 2013 budget year from the city.

PARKS STILL OWES CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS: COTNER ALSO REMINDED THE Aldermen that there are no big expenditures for the parks Department planned for 2014 and 2015 since the Parks still has to repay \$6.5 million to the Capital Improvement fund for an initial loan of \$8,190,000 to purchase park land.

SOLAR PANELS CONTINUED A SECOND TIME...SECRET SESSION PANNED FOR NEXT MEETING FOR CITY ATTORNEY'S OPINION. Dalton asked for the bill making an ordinance allowing the city to regulate solar panels be continued until the first meeting in November.

Dalton said the city attorney (Steve Garrett) now has an opinion that he will share with the board in a closed meeting.

WHOA: This issue does not involve a pending lawsuit, personnel matters or the purchase or sale of real estate. Dalton is trying to keep the public and residents from knowing Garrett's opinion. We are paying a lot of money every year for Garrett's services and have a right to know what his opinion on this issue. The Missouri attorney general publishes his opinion. There is no reason why this opinion should not be given in a public forum.

DEER LOVERS SPEAK: The bill to fund Lethal Deer Management for \$57,000 was first read at the meeting. Former alderpersons Al Gerber and Barbara Ann Hugs were there to speak against it...I think.

Gerber said the plan copied or at least studied by Town and Country was the one used by Solon, Ohio. According to the Solon, Ohio website the city stopped shooting deer in 2009 and has seen a 54-percent increase in the deer population.

Gerber is against shooting deer and prefers the far more expensive way of knocking the does out and surgically sterilize them. However the Solon plan showed that contraception or birth control was ineffective.

It appeared that Gerber was championing continued lethal shooting of deer, although I don't think it was what he had in mind.

Barbara Ann Hughes spoke and harked back to the days of Town and Country under Mayor Skip Mange drastically reducing the deer the population by having the \$100,000 deer roundup and transporting the deer to rural southeast Missouri, where most of them died after their organs shut down from stress and the shock of being captured.

She mentioned this as if it was one of Town and Country's great successes. In fact the Missouri Department of Conservation ordered the roundup to be stopped as it was cruel and inhuman.

DESTINY CHURCH PLANS The Destiny church on Des Peres Road facing I-270 has submitted plans before the Architectural Review Board and the Board of Aldermen that have been approved for the three phase exterior and interior remodeling of the church.

Of course this is kind of a charade, since a city government cannot prohibit a church from building unless it effects public health or safety.



APPOINTMENTS: Mayor Dalton has announced that he will appoint David Hough to the **Public Works Commission**. I believe David applied, rather than Dalton finding him. David will make a great addition to the Public Works Commission which currently does not have a sitting engineer. It is a good checks and balance, as Public Works Director Craig Wilde, a profession engineer can float anything past the businessmen on the commission as “an engineer.” Now they will be someone with the credentials to agree or disagree with Craig.

David retired from the Coast Guard where he ran public works and building projects for Coast Guard bases around the country. He later worked for a Chicago engineering firm. He lives in the Thornhill subdivision and keeps busy planning the building projects around the house and in his yard.

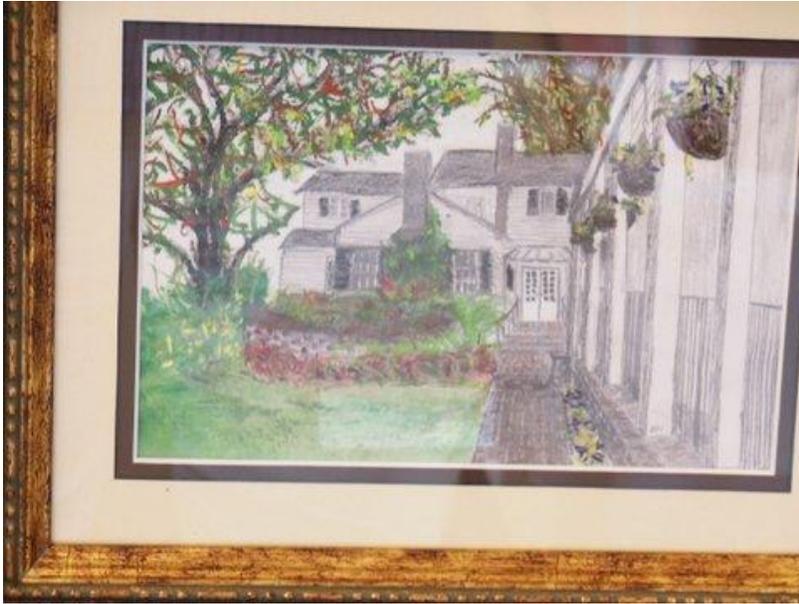
THE COMMUNITY RELATIONS COMMISSION...which at times I think would be better named, The Party Commission, because it seems that throwing parties is its main function, is adding new members.

Carla Bogard, probably the top realtor in Town and Country for the last couple of years is the newest member of the Commission. Dalton also announced he was going to name Fred and Mary Kay Wiesehan, managers of Mari d Villa. Now this is a good idea. If we are going to have a Party Commission, we need to have some focus on retired residents in the city which make up a large percentage of the population, whether still in their homes or at Mari de Ville and Delmar Gardens.

IMPRESSIONS OF TOWN AND COUNTRY...THE PAINT OUT: I have gone to every one of these events for one reason...IT WAS MY IDEA. I came up with this when I was the chair of the Arts Commission as something cheap and easy for a new Arts Commission to pull off.. Mayor/Cigarette Lobbyist/Eminent Domain Stealer of Widow's Property Jon Dalton put me in charge of the Arts Commission as a punishment for running against him in 2009 for mayor.

My goal was to do something that would not cost the city money and would give something for the commission to do. The first year of this annual event prize money and the reception came from donations. Artist entry fees could pay for the prizes now, but Lynn Wright has \$1,000 in the budget now for this event.

The idea for a fall event of plein air painters was because Webster Groves has a spring paint out. It was a natural to have a fall event to allow artists to capture fall colors.



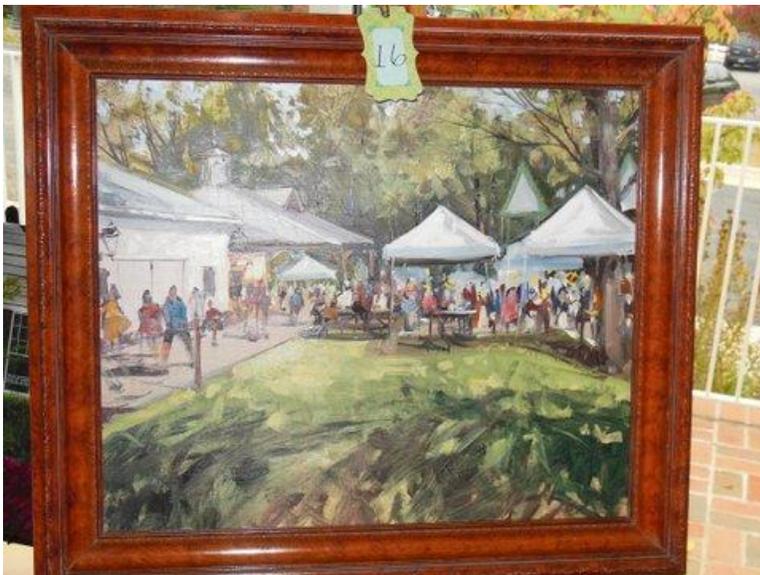
View of the rear east side of the longview Farmhouse.



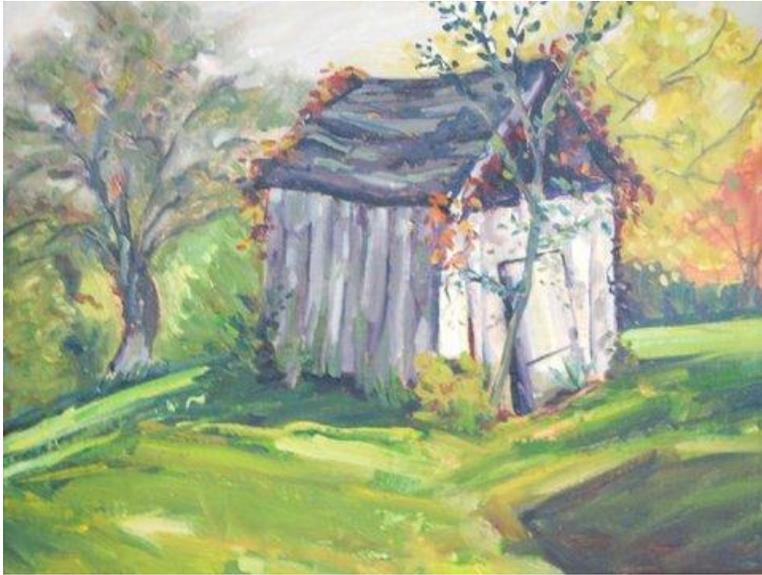
The Log House at Drace Park



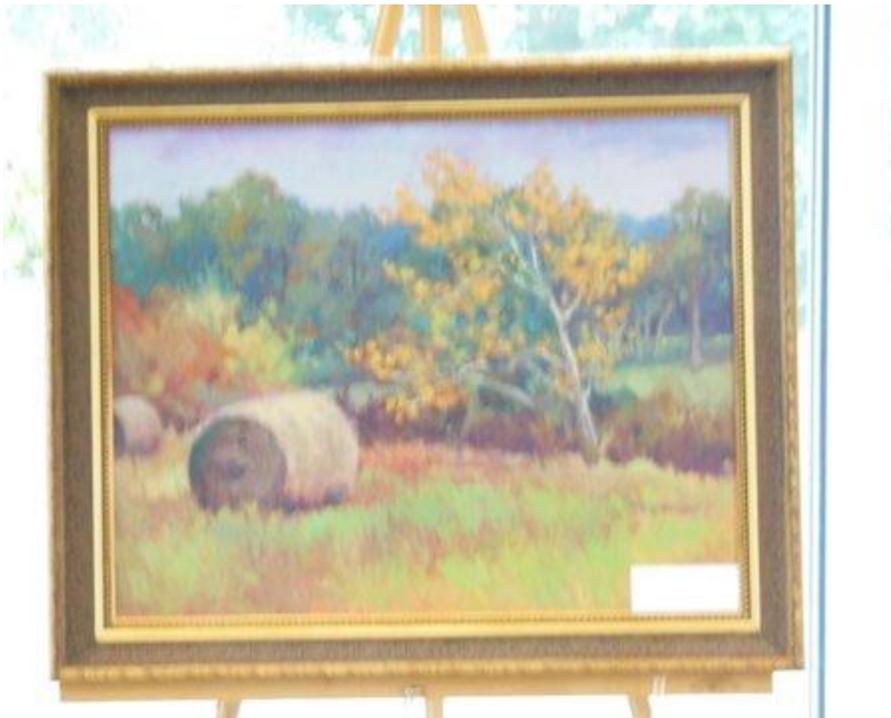
The front of the log house at Drace Park. The smallest park in town is a favorite among painters more so than Longview because of the flowers and wildflowers maintained by the Town and Country Garden Club.



This is the area by the barn where most of the Fall Festival events for kids were being held. At the first event, well known St. Louis area contemporary architect and now artist Ralph Fournier did a similar painting that was actually better. It was also totally ignored by the judges.



This is from the Eschenbrenner farm property located at the end of Barrett Station Road and on the edge of the Thornhill subdivision. The building actually was leaning with a warped roof. While this was in a more impressionistic style than many entries it was not a winner.



Hay seems to be popular with the judges who seem to lean more toward “country” than “town.” In the first year the judges picked two paintings that contained rolls of hay in a field. Another roll of hay won last year. This one was a winner this year.



This painting won the “People’s Choice Award” voted by people at the reception. It is barely in Town and Country. It is the Charter Communications property along I-270. The painting like several others is more of an architect rendering style of painting than an impressionistic, but I like it and had to give the artist credit for finding the scene.

SOMETIMES THINGS DON’T REALLY CHANGE THAT MUCH: I happened to find a Friday May 25, 1962 copy of the St. Louis Globe-Democrat in the basement of a home where an estate sale was being held. The big news of the day was that Astronaut Scott Carpenter had orbited the earth three times and then landed 250 miles off the expected landing spot in the Atlantic Ocean.

However on the editorial page the letters to the editor were about President Kennedy’s Medicare program. They seemed to mirror many complaints about Obamacare today..

The headline read...**Readers Consider Kennedy Medicare a Hoax**

“It is not an insurance program, but a device to impose a steady increasing tax burden upon the working generation for the benefit of retirees,”...wrote Rosemarie Droste of Alton.

Doubting Benefits

We have had an indoctrination from the Kennedy Administration of the benefits of the “medicare program. The cost of this circus would go a long way if used for the little man’s benefit...” wrote Vernon Fell of Kirkwood.

Medicare A Step Toward Socialism

“Having heard excerpts from President Kennedy’s cleaver speech in Madison Square Garden, I realize that his medical care bill is not an improvement on the social legislation of the Roosevelt days.

It is the destruction of American independence on the installment plan.”...wrote Richard M. Dwyer, a pre-med student at St. Louis University.

Proved by History

...”Here in the United States there is a trend toward a nationalized state. In the history of the world a nationalized state has always fallen and if the trend continues the United States will fall.”...wrote Hugo Roellig of St. Charles.

ODD SIGHT FOR A FEW DAYS: Back in 2008 you had to drive to Kirkwood, Webster or University City to see an Obama yard sign. It looked like the same thing was going to occur again this year, however for a few days an Obama sign did go up on Clayton Road just east of Weidman Road. It wasn’t up for long, but did last a few days longer than the “Bag a Buck in Town and Country” signs lasted before being stolen a few years ago. Here is what an Obama campaign sign looks like if you have never seen one.



NOW IS THE TIME TO GET FREE CHRISTMAS CONCERT TICKETS: One of the nice things about living in the Washington, DC area for 16 years was being able to attend the Army, Air Force or Navy Christmas concerts at Constitution Hall. We would have to stand in line in early November for the free December tickets, but it was worth it as the concert always made you feel good during a busy time of the year.

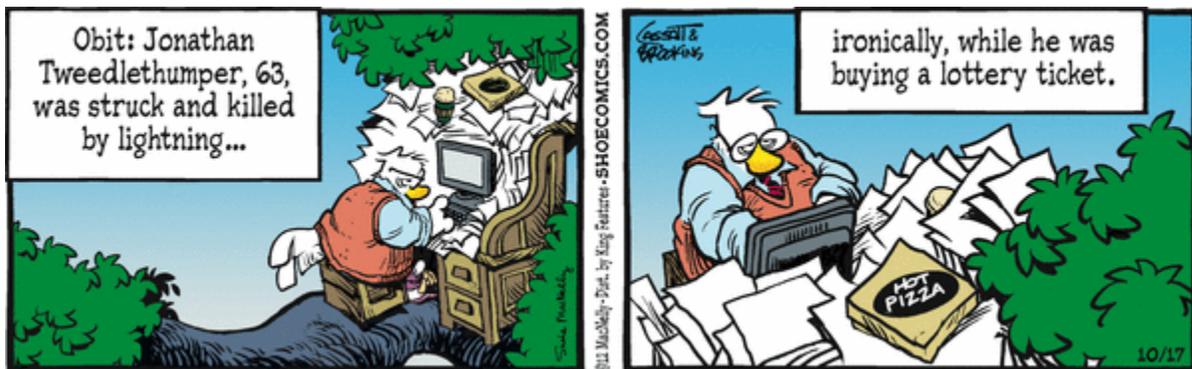
Returning to St. Louis we found out we could still hear the Air Force Band Christmas concert at the Scottish Rite on Lindell, without standing in line for tickets.



The Air force band of Mid America will hold its Christmas Concert at the Scottish Rite on Saturday December 8th at 7pm and Sunday December 9th at 3pm. For free tickets (up to four) simply write
Air Force Band Tickets
Scottish Rite
3633 Lindell Blvd.
St. Louis MO 63108

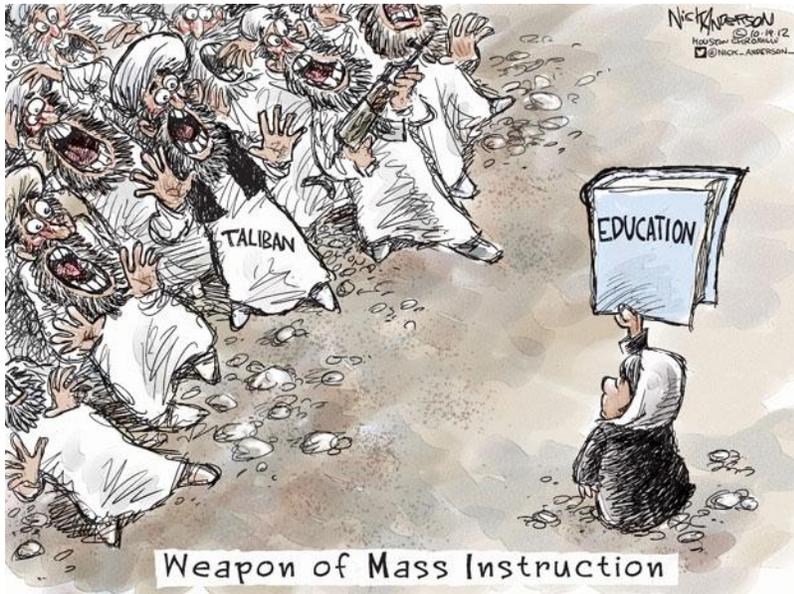
Be sure to enclose a self addressed stamped envelope. If you write early enough a free parking pass for the garage behind the Rite will be included.

CARTOONS:





"Perhaps you've heard on the news, ma'am,
that some of the seats have been
coming loose."



Weapon of Mass Instruction

