

COMMENTARY

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Connection, not dissension

As a member of the Worcester Friends Meeting (Quaker), I am appalled and horrified by the “shock and awe” campaign upon which the new occupant of the White House has embarked. I am writing this letter to share my deep belief that hatred and suspicion should not be the cornerstone of public policy. Quakers have no ritual and no hierarchy. We try to follow the advice of George Fox, who urged all to “walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone.”

That is our very difficult task under an administration that demonizes segments of society based on country of origin, color of skin or gender preference, etc. But one does not have to believe in God to treat all people with dignity and respect.

In both the White House and the City Council, we need civility and integrity in our public servants. We also need it among our neighbors. It’s going to be a long four years but, unless the majority of Americans truly believe that cruelty and hatred should be American values, we must choose connection over dissension.

Please write to your Congress people. Please educate yourself on the issues that are already hurting the most vulnerable among us. Please donate energy and money as you can. Don’t burn out or tune out. Run for local office. Register and vote. Please make your voice heard, whether it’s at a City Council meeting, a church or school event, or in conversation with your neighbor or your child.

Sheila Brenner, Worcester

Public safety overlooked

Will the state rubber-stamp and accept responsibility for 192 40B units?

No negative information about critical public safety issues with required off-site roadways’ improvements, or abutters’ legitimate concerns, was sent to the state’s Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities.

EOHLC wasn’t told the developer originally insisted on building 46 dwelling units. While refusing to make off-site roadway improvements, he threatened the Planning Board with a 40B plan. The Planning Board upheld Millbury’s bylaws and denied his project based on public safety concerns.

EOHLC was sent a Local Initiative Program agreement approval by Millbury’s Board of Selectmen, and an approval by Millbury’s Zoning Board of Appeals for the same Rice Pond Village 40B project for 192 dwelling units. Both didn’t require developer’s off-site roadway safety improvements.

EOHLC wasn’t told that at Millbury’s special town meeting, citizens voted against raising \$4 million to fix the roadways’ safety concerns. No help from Millbury.

Will EOHLC accept the financial responsibility of making off-site roadway safety improvements? Or will EOHLC accept personal responsibility for putting people’s property and lives in jeopardy without making those improvements?

EOHLC must be accurately informed and understand why this is the wrong place for overdevelopment, and why just rubber-stamping their approval ignores serious risks to public safety that can potentially put road use, people’s quality of life and lives at risk.

Please see our “Appeal Rice Pond Village 40B Project” website.

Truth can win this appeal.

Terry Burke Dotson, Millbury

Healey’s priorities off

So disappointed in Healey administration.

Governor Healey announced that the Massachusetts Department of Public Health would have access to an additional \$1.8 million for the expansion of abortion services.

We already have a robust and voluminous abortion services infrastructure. How about the thousands that relied on Nashoba Valley Medical Center in Ayer? Does she think North Central Massachusetts is overserved by Leominster, Gardner or Concord hospitals? Where do seniors, pregnant women, the disabled, the chronically ill get medical care now that Healey allowed NVMC to be shuttered?

There’s always plenty of money for housing, insurance, welfare and phones for illegal immigrants and abortion clinics, but nothing for desperately needed medical care for Mass. citizens, particularly our veterans and seniors. Where does she get her priorities?

Mark Eaton, Leominster

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recounts her days and wishes to see her family. While it would have been fascinating to read her account of the crowd and her thoughts on her experiences, this diary is powerful. It provides historians with her own voice, a voice beyond Herman Mann’s and those of other modern historical writers. While historians are right to question whether aspects of her story are true, one cannot discount the power of her story and her voice.

Fifty years after Sampson stood in front of the courthouse, Worcester hosted the first national Women’s Rights Convention.

Abby Kelley Foster was an abolitionist and women’s rights advocate who lived on Mower Street in Worcester, who not only housed runaway slaves but also refused to pay property taxes until women had the right to vote. She, like Sampson, died before the

Looking beyond fear

We are facing a blitzkrieg of extreme challenges from a new government. It feels overwhelming, frightening. There’s too much to fend off, too many vulnerable people to defend or rescue.

Blitzkrieg is a deliberate tactic of political warfare. It creates a sense of chaos. It throws us off-balance.

Fear triggers defensive responses in the brain. But we usually react against the fear itself rather than analyze the dangers. We push away whatever our biases tempt us to blame for the fear.

How can we engage the human part of our brains instead, the part that faces fear and then looks beyond it, seeking possibilities.

Buddhist Pema Chödrön tells of a young student whose teacher challenges her to do battle with fear. She bows politely to fear and asks how to defeat it.

Fear replies, “My weapons are that I talk fast, and I get very close to your face. Then you get completely unnerved, and you do whatever I say. If you don’t do what I tell you, I have no power. You can listen to me, and you can have respect for me. You can even be convinced by me. But if you don’t do what I say, I have no power.”

When we accept fear as helpful information, we can redirect fear’s energy toward effective responses. Tiny, partial responses, perhaps. But responses that are based in reality, not in our fear of fear.

Michael Austin Shell, Worcester

Beware of false idols

Lately I’ve been pondering how our nation finds itself struggling in the wilderness, hope diminished. How did it come to this?

Then I thought of a feature of our history, a spinoff from an old cautionary saying: “To live by the screen and stage is to die by them.”

Because it occurred to me, one of the country’s most fateful events took place at the Ford Theater in Washington, D.C., on April 14, 1865. On that night, seated just above the stage, President Abe Lincoln was shot and gravely wounded. His assailant was an actor and Confederate sympathizer, John Wilkes Booth.

Fast forward another century or so. Ronald Reagan, a well-known leading man in numerous Hollywood films, was elected governor of California. His natural charisma and acting skill, of course, were instrumental and he ran for president.

Finally, one last pertinent stage: the recent one set with the high-tech billionaires schmoozing at the second inauguration of President Donald John Trump, a former television star himself.

So, while Americans may love a spectacle, perhaps we should be more discerning about those we elevate to luminary status. Appearances can prove deceptive.

R. Jay Allain, Orleans

Marshall Plan for Gaza

Instead of planning for the ethnic cleansing and proposed land grab of war-torn Gaza, President Trump should be proposing a Marshall Plan for the wartime destruction in Gaza. Yes, Gaza needs to be rebuilt.

America bears responsibility for supplying the weapons Israel used to destroy Gaza’s apartment buildings and homes, places of worship, along with its infrastructure, schools, and 11 colleges and universities. Today 16 of the region’s 36 hospitals remain partially operational, and many of its medical doctors, nurses and staff frog-marched off to Israeli prisons where they were reported to have been beaten and tortured.

Following World War II, the Nuremberg trials were held for plotting and carrying out invasions of other countries across Europe and atrocities against their citizens. On Nov. 21, the International Criminal Court voted unanimously to issue arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant for war crimes and crimes against humanity. Warrants were also issued for three Hamas leaders who were subsequently assassinated by Israel.

If President Trump makes good on his promise to seize Palestinian land in Gaza, bulldoze its dead beneath the rubble and what little remains of its homes, schools and places of worship, and ethnically cleanse and depopulate the territory, he too may find himself with an International Criminal Court arrest warrant and inability to travel too far from America’s borders, except, of course, to Israel.

Genevieve Harris-Fraser, Orange

United States allowed white women the right to vote. They died before women had the right to divorce their husbands, they died before women could hold a credit card in their name, and they died before women had the right to control their own bodies.

Today, in 2025, women once again must fight for their rights. It is a never-ending battle. The voices of women in Worcester, more now than ever, must preserve their history. The Worcester Women’s History Project, founded in 1994, and the Worcester Women’s Oral History Project, founded in 2004, are active in the community preserving the history and voices of Worcester women, continuing to fight the battle for gender equity.

Kenzie Landsittel is a graduate student in Clark University’s accelerated master’s fifth-year history program. Her work with Deborah Sampson originated at her time as a curatorial intern for Historic New England.



Your Turn

Amie Shei
Guest columnist

Helping hand for Southbridge schools

Funders like The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts consider many different criteria when considering grant proposals.

Among the most important factors are strong and stable leadership within an applicant organization. For a number of years, The Health Foundation sought to make investments in Southbridge, yet struggled to do so without a clear signal of which organizations to fund to have the greatest impact on improving health in the community.

Southbridge is a town known for its rich history as the former home of American Optical Co., which was once the world’s largest manufacturer of eyewear, and a town that has faced a number of challenges since the company and other manufacturing jobs left decades ago.

In 2016, the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education placed the Southbridge Public Schools into receivership due to poor performance. The first state-appointed receiver’s tenure was brief and added to the instability and turnover in the district. The current receiver was appointed in 2018 and has remained committed to the district since that time. His leadership has ushered in a period of greater stability, which has enabled The Health Foundation to make significant grant investments in the school community.

Since 2018, The Health Foundation has awarded several grants to the Southbridge Public Schools, totaling over \$800,000. One grant supported the district in building internal capacity for positive behavioral intervention and supports to improve culture and climate in the schools and to maximize academic and behavioral outcomes for all students.

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Another grant, awarded last year, aimed to address significant barriers to access to vision services in the region by bringing an advanced mobile vision clinic to the Southbridge schools. In total, 115 students received comprehensive eye exams and over 180 pairs of eyeglasses were distributed, all free to students who now have improved vision and can better engage with school and the world around them.

Currently, The Health Foundation is supporting a multiyear, school-based mental health project at Southbridge High School. We facilitated an introduction to the Mosakowski Institute at Clark University, which yielded a collaboration between the institute and the Southbridge Public Schools that is bringing new technology and programming to the high school and building youth engagement. This is an important investment in the future of Southbridge students, and we anticipate that this project could become a model for other school districts across the state.

In addition to The Health Foundation’s investments in the public schools, we have invested in non-profit organizations such as the Center of Hope Foundation and YOU Inc. (an affiliate of the Seven Hills Foundation), organizations which provide important services in the Southbridge community.

We have found willing and capable partners in Southbridge, and The Health Foundation’s funding seeks to amplify their great work. Other funders have approached us wanting to learn about our investments in Southbridge and expressing interest in finding ways to make investments there, too.

The future is bright in Southbridge, a place once known as the “Eye of the Commonwealth.” Many eyes are now on Southbridge as a community on the rise and worth investing in, thanks to the strong foundation being built by local leaders and continued progress in the schools.

Amie Shei is president and CEO of The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts.