

## STATE LOTTERIES ARE PREDATORY INSTITUTIONS

Michael Jonas's interview of Barbara Dafoe Whitehead was first-rate. (See "Ben Franklin Was Right," *CW*, Summer '09.) Interesting, substantive, and entertaining, it put a much needed spotlight on state-sponsored predatory gambling and the "lottery class."

Promoted in the name of getting someone else to pay our taxes, predatory gambling is one of the key drivers in our debt culture. Why is our government, especially during these difficult economic times, actively trying to convince citizens to lose their money instead of putting it into wealth-building tools that allow them to accumulate the capital to realize the American Dream?

It's time the state lottery's business model was put under the microscope. A report by the National Gambling Impact Commission showed that the top 5 percent of state lottery users account for 54 percent of total sales (spending about \$4,000 each) and the top 20 percent provide 82 percent of total sales. That means the casual Lottery players, who make up four out of every five players, are of little value to the Lottery's revenue scheme, for these casual players spend only about \$75 a year. What would happen if all players spent the same as these casual players? The answer is that sales would fall by 76 percent.

Despite recent efforts to prosecute predatory subprime lending and to stop the predatory financial practices

of the credit card industry, the state lottery rolls on unchecked, remaining arguably the biggest predatory institution still standing in America.

There will always be unprincipled people in our society who attempt to profit from "something for nothing" schemes, using financial gimmicks and predatory practices to create the lure of free money. Our government should not be among them.

*Les Bernal*

*Executive Director  
Stop Predatory Gambling  
Lawrence*

## AUTHOR HAD ANTIPATHY TOWARD CHARTER SCHOOLS

*CommonWealth* need not have included in its description of Edward Moscovitch that his Perspective on charter schools ("No Magic Bullet") was taken from "a coalition of Massachusetts teachers' unions, principals, parents, superintendents, and school committees." It was already clear to the reader that this was the work of an anti-charter consultant hired by an anti-charter group to arrive at an anti-charter conclusion.

Moscovitch makes the same demographics-are-destiny pitch that charter school opponents have been making for over a decade. Once adjusted for those demographics, the argument goes, charter performance isn't much different from that of district schools.

More interesting is Moscovitch's effort to spin data supportive of char-



ter schools into a case against them. Even he notes that "a cluster of high-performing, high-poverty charter schools... are well ahead of virtually all non-charter schools." His results show the vast majority of charter schools scoring above the trend line on 10th-grade MCAS exams. The charts he uses show only the English portion of the test, since charter students' performance in math is even better.

The author's general antipathy to charter schools is clear, but it's harder to divine just what he and Mass Partners hope to accomplish. Moscovitch admits that the success of high-performing, high-poverty charters is beyond question. It is precisely those schools that the Patrick administration seeks to reproduce with its proposal to double the cap on charter schools in the Commonwealth's lowest-performing districts by allowing proven charter providers to replicate their success.

*Jon Clark and Kimberly Steadman*

*Co-directors  
Edward W. Brooke Charter School  
Roslindale*

**CORRECTION:** Because of a compilation error in data supplied to *CommonWealth*, the spending numbers for police and fire services were transposed in the "Measuring Menino" chart accompanying our cover story ("Menino's Long Ride") in the Summer issue. In fact, police spending in 2009 was \$284.9 million, while fire spending was \$161.6 million.

## FINDING A GOOD OUTLET FOR GOOD INTENTIONS

I was impressed with Alison Lobron's column ("Seeking to Serve") because it highlighted a common and unfor-

fortunate problem. Many people want to help those in need, but they can't find an outlet for their good intentions.

Four years ago, I too wanted desperately to help those in my community after Hurricane Katrina displaced my family. I wanted to beat back the tide of hopelessness by showing others that I cared.

Luckily, I found Horizons for Homeless Children (HHC), a nonprofit organization that staffs "Play-spaces" in homeless shelters. Since then, I have spent at least two hours a week playing with children in need as an HHC Playspace activity leader.

I continue to volunteer with HHC because their staff provides what every volunteer absolutely needs: comprehensive and ongoing training, a good working relationship with other nonprofits, and constant support and communication. Without this, I would feel overwhelmed and underutilized.

Finding an outlet for my good intentions filled a hole in my heart I did not think could be filled. At a time when I had lost hope, Horizons for Homeless Children, and the children I serve, gave me a reason to care again. I only wish more well-meaning people were as lucky.

*Katherine Lutz  
Boston*

### TAX-EXEMPT LAND HITS WESTERN TOWNS MOST

"Untouchable Turf" (Head Count) gives a Boston-centric view of tax-exempt properties. Too often western Massachusetts or rural communities are seemingly dismissed as unimportant. However, in the 10 cities and towns with the most tax-exempt property, the cities of Boston and Chelsea average 27.37 percent, and the remaining eight western towns

average 30.39 percent. One of the striking differences is that the positive economic impact that academic and nonprofit institutions have in Boston, such as jobs, is not usually a part of these small towns' economies. Forests and reservoirs do not produce equivalent economic activity. And these western communities do not have the for-profit business tax revenues of Boston or Chelsea.

I do hope Mayor Tom Menino understands the economic impact that nonprofit, tax-exempt academic, medical, social, and human service organizations contribute to Boston. If not, I'm sure a lot of us here in western Massachusetts would welcome these institutions into our communities.

*Timothy J. Diehl  
Executive director  
Berkshire Area Health  
Education Center  
Pittsfield*

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## GIC HASN'T DONE ENOUGH TO CUT COSTS

Stephanie Ullmann's Inquiry on the GIC ("Towns Seek More Power to Curb Health Care Costs") spells out the inadequacies of both the original GIC legislation and the revisions offered by the Special Commission on Municipal Relief.

Swampscott was one of the first towns to attempt to join the GIC in 2007, right after the governor signed the bill in June. Both of our attempts failed. The unions refused to come to the table for eight months, and, ironically, they voted on the issue the

same day that the stock market had its historic 800-point decline.

The teachers' union here would rather lose teachers than give up anything. In the last two years we have had to let go 45 young untenured and low-seniority teachers due to budget cuts, while those with seniority have enjoyed a contract with several raises. They have no problem "eating their young."

And the town recently caved by reducing the employee contribution to health insurance from 40 percent to 30 percent. Instead of a town/employee split of 60/40, we will have

a split of 70/30.

We are being held hostage by the municipal unions, and we are drowning.

*Mary DeChillo  
Former School Committee member  
Swampscott*

## CW FAN UNIMPRESSED BY SUMMER ISSUE

I am a great fan of your magazine. Alas, the summer issue is the weakest I recall in years.

Particular criticism to the author on the piece about concrete railroad ties ("Back Tracking"). I find the omission of any reference to Europe or Japan, where they have been the dominant technology for many decades, to be inexplicable. Are we back to hub-of-the-universe navel gazing?

*William Eykamp  
Arlington*

We welcome letters to the editor. Send your comments to [editor@massinc.org](mailto:editor@massinc.org), or to Editor, *CommonWealth* magazine, 18 Tremont Street, Suite 1120, Boston, MA 02108. Please include a city or town, as well as a daytime phone number. Letters may be edited for clarity and length.

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*Cleve Killingsworth, Chief Executive Officer  
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts*



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