



# The Ethical Humanist

## Newsletter of the Boston Ethical Community

Ethical Society of Boston  
MEMBER OF THE AMERICAN ETHICAL UNION

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April 2015

### Senator Eldridge to Speak on “We The People Act”

Fred Hewett

**O**n April 5, 2015, the Boston Ethical Community welcomes State Senator Jamie Eldridge (D-Acton), who will be speaking about the “We The People Act”, a joint resolution pending in the Massachusetts legislature.

This resolution, introduced by Senator Eldridge and Rep. Cory Atkins this past January, has two components:

- It calls on the United States Congress to propose a constitutional amendment stipulating (1) that the rights protected by the Constitution are the rights of natural persons, and (2) Congress and the states shall place limits on political contributions and expenditures to ensure that all citizens have access to the political process, and the spending of money to influence elections is not protected free speech under the First Amendment.

- If Congress fails to propose such an amendment within six months, the “We The People Act” puts Massachusetts on record calling for a Convention of States for the purpose of proposing the amendment.

You can read the full text of the resolution here: <http://www.wethepeoplemass.org/full-text>.

The impetus for the resolution is the Supreme Court’s 2010 ruling in the case of *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, which removed limits on the amount of money that corporations and unions can contribute to PACs and so-called “social welfare” groups.

Since the *Citizens United* ruling, numerous campaign finance laws at the federal and state levels have been overturned, beginning with key portions of the McCain-Feingold Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002. Not surprisingly, the result has been an enormous increase in the amount of money flowing to super PACs, and to the 501(c)(4) groups

that don't even have to disclose who their donors are.

The constitutional amendment in the proposed resolution would enable Congress to create reasonable campaign finance laws that would be immune from judicial review based on the free speech protections of the First Amendment.

The “We The People Act” is not the first anti-Citizens United resolution to be introduced in the Massachusetts legislature. A [similar one](#) was introduced, and passed, in 2012.

What’s novel in the current proposal is the second section. Our U.S. Constitution provides two means by which an amendment can be initiated: (1) by act of Congress, and (2) by a “Convention of States”. The latter requires Congress to hold a Convention of States if 2/3 of the state legislatures call for it. Any amendments emerging from such a convention would still require ratification by 3/4 of the states.

Come hear Senator Eldridge’s talk on April 5. This is a subject that is crucial to real democracy in our nation.



## The Way It Is (?)

Marvin Miller

### Taxes

I recently reread "Rights of Man", Tom Paine's 1792 response to Edmund Burke's tirade against the French revolution. Paine frequently condemns the taxes imposed by the British and former French monarchies.

But it's not taxes per se to which he objects. Near the end of his book Paine recommends what we would call a graduated income tax on incomes over 1000 pounds, starting at 2% and increasing to a maximum rate of 100% on incomes over 23000 pounds, or about \$2 million in today's money.

What Paine and others who complain about taxes really object to is who gets taxed, how much, and for whose benefit. Paine was objecting to taxes on people of modest means to support luxurious living by royalty and the aristocracy. Today's "anti-tax" advocates object to taxes imposed on very rich individuals and corporations for the benefit of people who have little.

The current US tax code is full of inequities that benefit the wealthy and powerful. That's not surprising, since it was written over the years by legislators whose campaigns

are financed by the wealthy and powerful. For example, for the 2014 tax year, auto travel for business is deductible at 56 cents per mile; for medical care it's 23.5 cents, and for charitable volunteer work it's 14 cents. Capital gains, i.e. the profit obtained by selling something for more than one paid for it, are taxed at a lower rate than wages, which are

***"Depreciation" deductions are allowed on assets which, in the long run, don't depreciate, like rental housing.***

income obtained by working. "Depreciation" deductions are allowed on assets which, in the long run, don't depreciate, like rental housing. Recently a major pharmaceutical company proposed moving its headquarters to Britain because foreign corporations pay a lower tax rate here than US companies do. There are thousands of other such inequities, known only to tax avoidance professionals.

When Mitt Romney ran for president, he said his income tax rate, on a multi-million dollar income, was about 15%. The justice of a tax code that allows such a low rate wasn't questioned by his opponent.

Unemployment compensation is taxable, to add insult to injury. Social Security is triply taxed: once when it's earned, once when it's received, and once when it's spent (on things that are subject to sales taxes. like soap and toilet paper). We don't see any complaints about such taxes from self-styled "anti-tax" folks.

Paine's opposition to the taxes of his time and his graduated tax proposal are actually advocacy for the reduction of wealth inequality. He makes this explicit. Policies advocated by the "anti-tax" or "small-government" faction have the opposite effect. We see no objection from them to the spending of tax revenue on police, prisons, war, or the preaching of their religion. They do object to spending for health care, education, housing, and other public services. They're not as explicit as Paine in stating their motives.

Paine's views on taxes are part of his overall pro-democracy, pro-equality philosophy. The philosophy of those who today talk about taxes and how to spend them may be inferred from the effects of the policies they advocate.

## ***Dire Straits (It's Still The Economy, Stupid)***

Andrea Perrault

Lately, news reports have heralded an improving U.S. economy, as evidenced by data about job creation and unemployment rates. However, can we really have confidence in such reports? More ominous trends are being chronicled that contradict this rosy picture. For example, part-time jobs are expanding and lower-level service sector jobs are increasing; higher paying jobs require more education, but the college graduation rates in science and math areas are not keeping pace with the need.

Economic inequality is at record rates in this country, even as discovered and discussed by Mitt Romney (he can now blame the Obama administration for it.) But since he's bowed out of the 2016 presidential race, he will need to advise whoever gains the financial advantage from his withdrawal (assuming that the candidate is in his ideological mold).

I find holes in many media stories, and there is a failure

to identify the roots of many social issues to economic inequality. For example, media stories about Chris Kyle, the Iraq veteran whose story was told in Clint Eastwood's heralded film "American Sniper" rarely comment on the limited career choices he seemed to have in life: rodeo cowboy or soldier. Is that all that his education prepared him for? What does that say about our society?

Media reports of drug abuse stories often highlight violence and crime. But how many are drawn into this lifestyle by an inability to find meaningful work? Unemployment, especially unemployment that continues after government benefits have been exhausted, weigh heavily on those affected. Alternatives are few — not everyone can reinvent themselves as entrepreneurs. The media rarely makes the connection that the drug culture benefits from a society with little to offer the chronically unemployed.

Movies can show the reality of economic inequality, but are we paying attention? "Winter's Bone", with a riveting performance by Jennifer Lawrence, depicts a

sad, rural culture suffering under the weight of no options. "Out of the Furnace" with Christian Bale also depicts the sadness of a downtrodden working class, and characters struggling to survive. In television, the gripping series, "The Wire" brings you to inner city Baltimore and the urban wasteland that finds young people in the grip of drugs and crime. Comedian and actor Dennis Leary recently funded a non-fiction film about Detroit and its fire-ravaged neighborhoods. Leary champions the plight of firefighters, and this film keenly illustrates the burden of an American city under the gun of unemployment and despair.

I recommend these films and programs and encourage people to see and witness real economic destruction of American society. Hopefully, we will wake up and look for real solutions for the working class and the poor in America. As the middle class slides down the slippery slope of economic security, perhaps more of us will look for real sustainable futures. The 2016 election is just around the corner — can we wait that long to act?

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### **Would You Like to Contribute an Article to *The Ethical Humanist*?**

The *Ethical Humanist* is published monthly, and we are always looking for content. That includes commentaries, book reviews, inspirations, musings, poems, and news about the community. We are happy to assist with copyediting. If you have something to submit for consideration, please email your material to [newsletter@bostonethical.org](mailto:newsletter@bostonethical.org). Thanks!

## Sunday Lectures in April

April 5

### James Eldridge, Massachusetts State Senator (Democrat, Acton)

*"We the People Act" - Proposed Action to the Oppose Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission Decision*

In this talk, Senator James Eldridge (D-Acton) will inform us about his recently-filed legislation, the *We the People Act*, co-sponsored by Rep. Cory Atkins, to build a strong and unified voice in Massachusetts against the Supreme Court's Citizens United decision.



documentary about legalizing the right to die in Washington State.

In 1994, a year after serving two terms as one of the most popular governors in modern Washington State history, Booth Gardner was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. In 2008, as his health continued to deteriorate, he returned to the political spotlight, this time as the driving force behind a ballot initiative that would legalize one's choice to die.

Marie Manis of *Compassion & Choices* will lead a discussion after the film and also talk about the campaign to pass a similar initiative here in Massachusetts. *Compassion & Choices* is the nation's oldest and largest nonprofit organization working to improve care and expand choice at the end of life.

April 12

### Marie Manis, Compassion & Choices of Massachusetts



*Promoting Compassionate Choices about Death in 2015 — Film and discussion*

Once again, *Compassion & Choices* will file a bill with the Massachusetts State Legislature to support the adoption of policies that promote individual choice in the manner of death.

Last year, the Board of trustees of the Ethical Society of Boston voted to support the legislation, and submitted testimony to the legislative committee responsible for moving the bill forward. The bill was not reported out of committee, and in 2015, Compassion and Choice will submit legislation. In this program, a film will be shown and followed by discussion.

The film is "The Last Campaign of Governor Booth Gardner". It is an Oscar-nominated short

April 19

### Dr. Zygmunt J.B. Plater, Boston College Law School, Professor of Environmental Law, Author

*Humanist of the Year*

Zygmunt J. B. Plater is Professor of Law at Boston College Law School, teaching and researching in the areas of environmental,



property, land use, and administrative agency law. Over the past 30 years he has been involved with a number of issues of environmental protection and land use regulation, including service as petitioner and lead counsel in the

extended endangered species litigation over the Tennessee Valley Authority's Tellico Dam, representing the endangered snail darter, farmers, Cherokee Indians, and environmentalists in the Supreme Court of the

United States, federal agencies, and congressional hearings. He was chairman of the State of Alaska Oil Spill Commission's Legal Task Force over a two-year period after the wreck of the M/V Exxon-Valdez. He was a consultant to plaintiffs in the Woburn toxic litigation, *Anderson et al. v. W.R. Grace et al.*, the subject of the book and movie *A Civil Action*. Drawing upon his work for the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Commission he researched and consulted on responses to the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

Dr. Plater will discuss the continuing mission of and the challenges to citizen environmentalism.

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**April 26**

**Joshua Ostroff, Outreach Director,  
Transportation 4 Massachusetts**

*Massachusetts Transportation Now and for the Future*

Transportation for Massachusetts is a diverse coalition of Bay State organizations working together to create safe, convenient, and affordable transportation choices for everyone in Massachusetts. Its 30 members have expertise in transportation, affordable housing, social justice, public health, the environment, planning and smart growth. Transportation issues are particularly important today given the severity of the past winter and the breakdown of our transportation systems, as well as transportation issues if Boston hosts the Olympics.



### Hospitality and Refreshment Schedule

Sunday attendees are asked to contribute some food item to the refreshment table, according to the first letter of their last name.

**April 5: A-F, April 12: G-K, April 19: L-R, April 26: S-Z**

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## Information About the Society

### Officers for 2014-2015

President	Brian King	(781) 581-6104
Vice President	Fred Hewett	(617) 945-0396
Treasurer	Terry Goldzier	(617) 232-7704
Secretary (acting)	Margo Woods	(781) 646-6059

### Other Board Members

Donald Aharonian, Peter Ames,  
Cathy Haskell, Andrea Perrault, Martha Werman

Archivist	Brian King	(781) 581-6104
Caring Committee	Marline Miller	(617) 244-1471
Ethical Action	Margo Woods	(781) 646-6059
Membership		
Music	Ingrid Kisliuk	(617) 332-7109
	Izabella Mazhbites	(617) 731-1089
Newsletter	Fred Hewett	(617) 945-0396
	Martha Werman	(617) 497-7888
Officiant	Katrina Scott	(617) 965-3067
Program Comm.	Andrea Perrault	(781) 593-5794
Publicity	John Lampert	(617) 923-8550

Sunday Bulletin	Susan Caulfield	(617) 547-6085
Website	Fred Hewett	(617) 945-0396

### Groups Around the Society

Movie Group	Marline Miller	(617) 244-1471
Walking Group	Doris Berger	(617) 277-1839
9:00 Forum	Carolyn Nalbandian	(617) 916-2229

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**~ Program Schedule for April 2015 ~**  
*(Details on Page 4)*

<b>April 5</b>	<b>James Eldridge, Massachusetts State Senator</b> <i>“We the People Act” - Proposed Action to the Oppose Citizens United V. the Federal Elections Commission Decision</i>
<b>April 12</b>	<b>Marie Manis, Compassion &amp; Choices of Massachusetts</b> <i>Promoting Compassionate Choices about Death in 2015</i>
<b>April 19</b>	<b>Dr. Zygmunt J.B. Plater, Boston College Law School, Professor of Environmental Law, Author</b> <i>Humanist of the Year</i>
<b>April 26</b>	<b>Joshua Ostroff, Outreach Director, Transportation 4 Massachusetts</b> <i>Massachusetts Transportation Now and for the Future</i>

**Sunday Meetings are held at 10:00 AM at 30 JFK St in Cambridge**

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