

## **California Day Dream, Traffic, and Government Reform**

**By Michael J. Atwood**

I forgot to write my column last week. I'm not joking; I simply forgot. I was on the 21<sup>st</sup> floor of the San Diego Marriott staring down at the marina and Embarcadero when the email popped up on my iPhone from my editor, John Andre: "I wondering if I'm getting a column from you this week? We're ready to go to print." Twenty-two weeks and I've written my column every weekend but the last one of 2008, I forget.

As I stood there in a state of panic, I wanted to blame my forgetfulness on the sunny 67-degree weather or the maybe the fact that I spent four days at Legoland. I wanted to blame it on my daily runs around the scenic Batiquitos Lagoon in Carlsbad, which served as my preparation for an 18:37 Holiday Bowl 5K race. I wanted to blame the scenic train ride up the Californian coast to L.A. where I got to drink a beer or two at Feehan grad Jimmy Connor's Red Sox-themed pub, Sonny McLean's. I wanted to blame the effort I put into my short story collection crafting my fiction or the time I spent with my wife and kids and in-laws. I wanted to blame the crowded airports and security. I even considered blaming the 3-hour time change or the rowdy Oregon and Oklahoma State fans at my hotel.

But the truth was, I simply forgot. I'm sorry. I am just a writer / educator who got away on a vacation, a hell of a vacation, with his family. And I'm fortunate to have very generous in-laws who take pity on our cold and poor souls in exchange for quality time with their grandchildren. It's a nice arrangement.

Then, after our midwinter California day dream, we were quite poetically slapped in the face by the cold. Something went wrong with our furnace and when we arrived at Colburn Street from Logan early Friday morning, the house temperature was hovering at 37 degrees. After getting the heat going, we pulled the car back onto Rte. 1 and enjoyed a family meal at Taco Bell at 1:30 a.m in the warmth of my car. It was about our 15<sup>th</sup> hour of travel of the day by that point. By 2:30 a.m. the temperature was in the mid-50s and were able to bundle up the kids and get to bed.

After sleeping off the jetlag, I found myself settling back in and contemplating what needs to be done, not only with our preparation to get back to school, but also with our town in general during 2009. One thing that came to mind on Saturday, as I sat in traffic on Route 1, was traffic patterns. The most irritating traffic signal in North Attleborough, in my opinion, is the one in the far left hand lane in front of Borders. Now, it bothers me because our family has spent more time dealing with that frustrating 20-second green light there with our various visits to Marshall's, Panera, Borders, Toys R Us and Circuit City than any other light in town. I guess the easy solution is to make that a longer green light to get people off Route 1 faster.

Another issue in town is the attempt to overhaul town government. I've voiced my opinion on this topic and find the whole idea of reviewing a charter for reform in two months by an ad-hoc committee a little insulting. I'm all about democracy and I, like John Rhyno, am very interested in what the townspeople of North Attleborough have to say: in the form of a town vote. But quite honestly, I'm also afraid that newcomers to our town may too quickly support the whole mayoral idea without understanding what it

means. I will still contend that N.A. has a good thing going with selectmen and I don't believe it would be the same place with a mayor at the helm.

Am I afraid of progress? The short, my answer is yes. Progress is defined in this case as electing a mayor who will magically transform things and get us money and bonds and rub elbows with Deval Patrick. Oh, it will be so great...if you can even find the governor between his book signings, trips to see Obama, and attempts to create \$7.00 tolls and cut 300 state police officers.

Let's be realistic: We are facing hard financial times now. There are 50 cities in Massachusetts and 301 towns, so it's easy to feel we'd be more effective with a mayor like a city. However, do you realize that Brookline is still a town and does not have a mayor. Yes, Brookline. How do they seem to accomplish things but N.A. can't? We need work on this in 2009: getting more issues on the table for the selectmen to decide on. Give them power, let them rule, and reform their restrictions in the charter. Let five people rule.

The whole process right now can be likened to a term paper being written the night before it is due; you don't change a town's government in haste. Why hasn't the last few years been exclusively devoted to this process if it was so important to the selectmen who support it? Work out the details then bring it to the voters, in the years before, not six months before. On that note, the public meetings on January 19<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> about government reform have been cancelled. Maybe I should start a Facebook page on the topic if in-person attendance has been the issue.

And for those who are interested: you have until February 10<sup>th</sup> to get nominated for the RTM and vote on these issues, including the government reform / mayor issue. 78 spots are open out of 135. The right people out there can make the difference.