

Valley Breeze
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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Her Legislative Grant Backing Should Bring Shame, Not Pride

In a press release to The Valley Breeze last week by way of attacking Senator Edward O'Neill (Dist. 17), Linda Butera-Noble hails legislative grants as "extremely important to the well being of the many worthwhile organizations which are so vital to our communities and state." Perhaps she is misinformed or merely hasn't taken the time to understand. There is a good reason why Sen. O'Neill proposed to end this practice. It appears that this is a case of good old Rhode Island politics - those in power using it to give their cronies an edge. And it actually goes against the R.I. Constitution Article VI, Section 11, which requires a 2/3 vote for any bill appropriating public money - whether for public or private purposes.

There is no accountability or visibility to this use of tax dollars. Grant money is dispersed by the House and Senate leadership, in a secret process known only to them. They decide to whom and how much will be appropriated. Given past appropriations it is apparent that this \$1.15 million fund is used to reward loyal allies. This is evidenced by the fact that in the House, no Republicans received any grants. In the Senate only two responsible senators, Ed O'Neill and Mike Pinga, refused to ask for and/or take any grants.

It is true that many worthwhile groups receive some support. In fact, most grants are in the range of \$500 to \$5,000. However, legislative grants for fiscal year 2010 amounted to \$1.15 million! While most grants are relatively small, some glaring exceptions stand out. For example, in 2000 then Sen. Frank T. Caprio managed a grant of \$25,000 for his son's private school. This year speaker Gordon Fox received grants totaling \$55,500 and Senate President Teresa Paiva-Weed got \$76,000. Former Speaker William Murphy gave out \$28,000, Rep. Al Gemma gave out \$27,000. (More information can be found at the Operation Clean Government website, www.ocgri.org.)

This questionable use of tax dollars, and the shady process of endowment has gone on long enough! Independent Ed O'Neill knows that we can no longer afford to allow leadership this kind of free reign. Perhaps Democrat Butera-Noble is looking forward to joining this elite group of recipients and that's why she's defending the status quo.

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