

6-10-11 The Wizard of Ought

Who would have thought that watching my grandchildren, Haley, age six and Joey, age 4, act in a play would cause me to think about the recession, politics and those with power to hold or loosen the purse-strings? I went in expecting amusement; I left full of amazement for the reminders of governmental machinations. The play was *The Wizard of Oz*. The line sparking the wheels to turn in my head was when Dorothy asked the Scarecrow how he could talk if he didn't have a brain and the Scarecrow responds, "I don't know... But some people without brains do an awful lot of talking... don't they?" I laughed and was reminded of a meeting I attended the day before.

It was my first time attending the meeting of the State Reclamation and Mosquito Control Board. I went because I heard they would be cutting the budgets of our County Mosquito Programs. From the Reclamation Board's own website, their role is explained as, "The Board establishes administrative and technical policy, guidelines, and best management practices to insure that mosquito control programs are effective and safe." It is an odd, triangulated relationship between the Departments of Agriculture, Environmental Protection and Conservation and Recreation, with those three having the fiduciary power over the County Mosquito Control Programs, and, in turn, the domino effects on the Department of Public Health, who conduct the surveillance of mosquito numbers, species, and their disease levels and the local health board's ability (or lack thereof) to inform you, the public.

When I arrived, the meeting had already begun and there was lots of talking of the Scarecrow type. The money-deciding people were asking repetitive questions, driving the Mosquito Control person from Norfolk County crazy with frustration as she explained, in detail, that the answers were in her submitted report. She had a reason and need for every penny in the budget. The next forty five minutes were spent watching the money people tap on calculators and discuss which figure they were referring to, with or without the roll-over amounts, with or without the emergency expenditures of last year's aerial spraying. Did the roll-over amounts even exist if they were already spent? Should roll-over amounts be seen as extra, simply because they were used at the end of a fiscal year? Mosquito Control people tried and begged for reasoning on the part of the Reclamation Board. It was confusing but I followed it. There are different ways of looking at situations and anyone who is in charge of making budgetary decisions at this time, is probably between a rock and a hard place.

The way I saw it, we should not be penny wise and end up pound foolish. I stood and asked to be recognized for a comment. I pointed out that first of all, not all counties had a history of life-threatening disease carried by mosquitoes. The ones represented at that meeting did have that problem and most of their efforts were to prevent disease. Spring and early summer efforts should not be seen as addressing mosquitoes only as an annoyance, even though the Plymouth Program has received two thousand five hundred calls for spraying already! In fact, there was evidence that if we spent even more on early interventions in the swampy areas, we could prevent the need for the extremely costly aerial sprayings over widespread areas, which result in spraying over organic farms.

One man on the Reclamation Board looked sincerely surprised and urged me to explain what I meant. Not being an entomologist, and not having at the tip of my tongue, all the mosquito species names and habits, I thought of the *Culisetta melanura*, a bird-biter inhabiting the swamps. Even though it is a bird-biter, the activity between this mosquito and the birds is what allows Eastern Equine encephalitis to grow and strengthen, known as amplification. If we can reduce that amplification process, we would logically also reduce the bridge vectors (biting both birds and mammals), which in turn bring the disease closer to mammal biters and mammals include people! I added that I knew other species were also part of the amplification process and I could not think of their names just then but some posed unique challenges not addressed by the environmentally preferable larviciding methods. Some of these species were not killed by larvicides because they were attached to underwater roots, providing them with all their oxygen needs. That is why I am in favor of more adulticiding,

with ultra low volume, by the small airplanes already owned, to spray only over targeted swamp areas with a history of high levels of EEE.

The same man actually raised his eyebrows as if this is the first he had ever heard such a thing and asked me if I could produce any evidence for these ideas. I told him yes and promised to send it along asap. I found out later that he is in an entomologist. I now believe he knew exactly what I was talking about. Was he the guard at the door of Oz? Why didn't I read the invisible notice?

The meeting was also attended by Representative Denise C. Garlick. I found out later that she is a registered nurse. She is my heroine and mentor! She was the Good Witch of the North, with her compassion and dedication to areas of true need. With great composure, she stood several times and calmly questioned the board about the legislative authority to make decisions of health matters versus budget matters and whether or not, since their commissioner was not actually present, did they not have any lee way at all to exercise decisions based on evidence of need, as did the woman from the Department of Conservation and Recreation? I heard both yes to discretion and no to it. It was a stumbling mumbling moment lacking eye contact

I still want to thank you, Representative Garlick, for proving that a politician can have a heart, a mind and courage. I need that example, for only minutes earlier, in response to a Reclamation Board member stating his doubt that this early treatment had anything to do with disease prevention and was, in fact, mostly to prevent the annoyance factor of mosquitoes, I called out, "After all these decades of EEE activity in these hotspots, you are now questioning and doubting the prevention measures?" I apologized for speaking out of turn and without recognition (from the great Oz). I was beside myself with disbelief and pain for the two mothers present in the room who had lost their children to EEE.

Kimberly King, Plymouth County Mosquito Control Commissioner concluded the meeting with her list of so-called survivors of EEE and the multi-million dollar sum it has cost so far for hospital and nursing home care for these people.

I think I need a degree of Doctor of Thinkology before I return to the wizards hiding behind the curtain. That meeting was my initial class and I learned a lot. We need heart, mind, and courage so that we can care enough to save a life, be brave enough to return and wise enough to know what to say, for I do want us to do what we ought. I hope future meetings will be run by the Wizard of Ought.

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