

## The Montague Reporter

*"The Voice of the Villages"*

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**Founded by**  
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 August 2002

## Heads in the Sand?

The Leahy Laws are good laws, as laws go.

Born and raised in Montpelier, the son of newspaper publishers, Patrick Leahy went off to our nation's capital to become a lawyer and came back to serve the public in his native Vermont. He ran for US Senate in 1974 and won, one of a cohort of liberal Democrats swept into Congress amid the Watergate crisis and the first Democratic senator in the state's history. He served for 48 years.

After 22 of those years, Leahy introduced an amendment to a bill that would lead – or could lead – to a reshaping of American foreign policy. In the mid-1990s the country was pouring operational support into Colombia, a nation beset by brutal civil war for decades, under the umbrella of the global drug war, and it was becoming obvious to all objective observers that the funding was being used to commit atrocities against civilians.

Leahy's motion stipulated that any foreign force found to be committing human rights abuses will not be eligible for US aid until they demonstrate that they are reforming their behavior. This was such a bright idea Congress applied it to all State Department funding, and then set up a similar safety mechanism on Department of Defense funding. (The DOD's version can be ignored if the Secretary of Defense feels "extraordinary circumstances" accuse the crimes in question.)

The Leahy amendments represent a paradigm shift for the US, which let's just say has not *always* made sure the operations it sponsors on all points on our planet's surface fall under the "non-human-rights-abuse" category.

"It is different from other human rights legislation because it does not require a decision to cut off aid to an entire country," Amnesty International explains, "which the US government is often reluctant to do – rather it tackles the challenge by prohibiting aid solely from the offending units... The Leahy Law has saved lives since its passage and it provides an incentive to countries whose security forces' possess poor human rights records to clean up their act."

Around Thanksgiving a second Vermont senator, Bernie Sanders, told *The Intercept* that he was considering invoking the Leahy laws in the matter of ongoing US military aid to Israel. Sanders has been a supporter of the state of Israel

historically, and volunteered for several months in 1963 at a kibbutz outside Haifa – during the assault on Gaza, much of the international left has considered him a coward and a disappointment for refusing to call for a mutual ceasefire.

Nevertheless, he seemed to feel it would be a good idea to have our country follow its own law by simply requesting that the State Department compile for Congress "information on Israel's human rights practices" and describe "the steps that the United States Government has taken to... discourage any practices that are inimical to internationally recognized human rights."

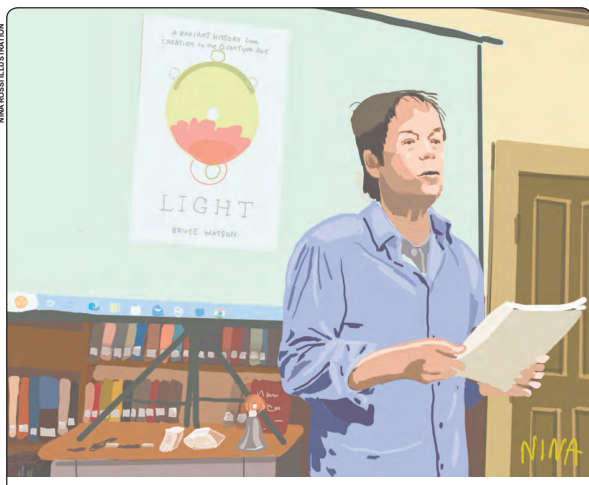
Sanders forced a vote last Tuesday. "A vote against this resolution essentially says, 'I don't want more information,'" he argued. "'I don't want to know how US military aid is being used. I don't want to know what responsibility the US may have in this humanitarian disaster. I want to bury my head in the sand.'" S.Res.504 was slapped down by 35 Republican and 37 Democratic votes to table the resolution, and 17 convenient absences. Standing with Sanders in the request for information were one Republican and nine Democrats, including both Massachusetts senators.

"For decades, I have steadfastly stood by Israel," said Sen. Edward Markey. "But the Netanyahu government cannot continue to conduct the war in Gaza the way it has until now. It must protect innocent Gazan civilians, negotiate the return of the remaining hostages held by Hamas, and unequivocally commit that it will not engage in a forcible mass transfer of Palestinian civilians from Gaza."

Many senators explaining their votes to table the resolution implicitly acknowledged that the aid is being used to violate human rights. "I am concerned that the resolution could potentially cut off all aid to Israel and send a message that invites other adversaries in the region to expand the current conflict," said Sen. Patty Murray (D-Washington).

And Lindsay Graham (R-South Carolina), according to the *Jerusalem Post*, "likened the Israelis' need to ensure unconditional surrender from Hamas to the US decision to use the atomic bomb to force Japan's surrender in WWII."

Once we understand that what is happening in Gaza is *US policy enforced by Israel*, rather than Israeli policy supported by the US, all this mess begins to make more sense.



Bruce Watson shared highlights from his book, *Light: A Radianant History from Creation to the Quantum Age*, at the Montague Center branch library on Monday. His talk touched on art, science, spirituality, and philosophy – including a few nifty hands-on demos. Watson also writes an online magazine, *The Attic*, which features "true stories for a kinder, cooler America."

## Letter to the Editors

### Library Mob Explains Lot Choice

Montague's Library Trustees appreciate all the public and private feedback we received in 2023 – through surveys, focus groups, public forums, and through emails and conversations – related to our pursuit of a Massachusetts Public Library Construction Project grant to either expand Carnegie Public Library or construct a new library building.

In response to questions we've been receiving about our process for selecting a site for a potential new building, the Library Director and Trustees have written the following statement describing the process by which 38 Avenue A was selected for the MPLCP grant proposal:

"The Montague Public Libraries Trustees support a library construction project that would expand the Carnegie Library or construct a new building in downtown Turners Falls/Great Falls.

"Over the last two years, the Libraries' Trustees and Library Director have polled the community, held focus groups, facilitated one-on-one interviews, and organized public forums, first for the Libraries' strategic planning process and again for the Libraries' construction project application process.

"The community has made clear that they would like to see an expanded or new library in Turners Falls/Great Falls. They have also expressed unequivocally that they wish for the Montague Public Libraries to maintain our three-branch system, and as such, the Trustees and Library Director have written into our construction application that there will be no reduction in hours or services at the Millers Falls or Montague Center branches.

"Community feedback collected in 2022 for our Strategic Plan emphasized the importance of walkability and neighborhood connectivity. Following this feedback, in winter 2022 the Library Director and Town Administrators identified three potential downtown Turners Falls/Great Falls sites to be considered for a new library. These three were: 11 Power Street (formerly Railroad Salvage in the Patch), a First Street municipal lot behind the Shady Glen (since acquired by Habitat for Humanity), and 38 Avenue A (previously Cumberland Farms).

"In early 2023, the state clarified that applications for the Construction Program grant must identify just two sites – one being the existing building's location (for an expansion project), and the other being the site for a newly constructed building.

"Ultimately 38 Avenue A was selected as the most advantageous site for possible new construction. Located in walking distance to all of downtown's amenities, in the most population-dense neighborhood in Franklin County, this site is also close to the bike path and local bus routes, making it the most accessible and most equitable of sites, should the current location be unable to meet the diverse interests and needs of the community."

For more details on the Public Library Construction Grant process, please check out [montaguepubliclibraries.org/building](http://montaguepubliclibraries.org/building).

**Will Quale, chair**  
 Montague Public Libraries Trustees

### SMALL CORRECTION

Reader Sarah Greenleaf reflected on her own Letter to the Editor in last week's edition (*Town Should Preserve Rattlesnake Gutter Road*), noting that, while "coming down with a head cold," she erroneously referred to a state inspector as being from the "DPW" rather than the Department of Transportation.

"[T]he point of what I said remains the same," she added, "that the inspector from DOT was not an ecologist and thus could not properly evaluate environmental impact to ecosystems."

Apologies to Ms. Greenleaf for not catching it on our end, and best wishes for a speedy recovery. – Eds.



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