



To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

[Click here to return to previous page](#)

Article published Sep 2, 2010

Would you vote for a dragonfly?

Dianne Williamson

dwilliamson@telegram.com

Pity poor Secretary of State William Galvin.

As the primaries approach, the man in charge of statewide elections is grappling with some odd errors in translation.

After fending off a Chinese uprising for years, he was finally forced to capitulate to demands for Chinese-language ballots in Boston, even though, according to Galvin, Tom Menino's name would be translated to "Imbecile" and Mitt Romney would be "Sticky Rice," and that probably wouldn't be fair to stupid people or Uncle Ben.

Even more vexing, Galvin recently recalled hundreds of thousands of ballots in Worcester and three other communities, all because a Spanish misspelling transformed Guy Glodis from a sitting sheriff into a winged insect with multifaceted eyes. Specifically, a one-letter error in the Spanish word for "sheriff" informs voters that Glodis is, actually, a "dragonfly."

And while Galvin was able to recall, reprint and redistribute the regular ballots to alert voters that Mr. Glodis does not possess six legs and devour mosquitoes — at least not during election season — any Spanish-speaking voter who uses an absentee ballot will be notified that Glodis is an "Aguacil actual," or "current dragonfly." The spelling should have been "Alguacil," the Spanish word for sheriff.

"All the absentee ballots went out with the misspelling," said Galvin, who stressed that the bug blunder underscores the pitfalls of bilingual ballots. "I won't recall them and put people's votes at risk."

Political insiders are undecided as to whether Spanish-speaking voters will reject or embrace the specter of a dragonfly as state auditor. It's a difficult question, mainly because no one knows what a state auditor actually does, so that many voters could assume that an insect is just as qualified as, say, Joe DeNucci. Even Michael Goldman, a Democratic politico working for Glodis' opponent, Suzanne Bump, was careful to say that he has "no reason to believe Hispanic people are biased against dragonflies." But he admitted he was unsure.

"Having never seen polling data on whether the dragonfly is popular or negative with absentee, Hispanic voters, it's hard to have an informed opinion as to whether dragonfly is a help or a hindrance," said Goldman, tongue planted firmly in cheek. At least I hope it was. You can never be sure, with political operatives.

And the candidate himself, My Guy the Fly, was surprisingly nonchalant when notified that statewide absentee ballots will characterize him as an insect.

"Contrary to public belief, I'm a very low-maintenance candidate," Glodis claimed. "I don't think it will have much impact. I wouldn't even have asked for a reprint. It seems like a lot of wasted money."

It does, doesn't it? When asked, though, Galvin claimed that he couldn't estimate the cost of swapping ballots in the four communities — Worcester, Boston, Lawrence and Southbridge. (Holyoke, Springfield and Chelsea were unaffected). Nor could he say how many ballots in total had to be recalled. In Worcester, City Clerk David Rushford said the error involved about 100,000 ballots.

"It's still a work in progress," Galvin said. "I assume I'll get some kind of invoice (after the primaries)."

He also said that he doesn't speak Spanish and doesn't know the meaning of the misspelled word, although he was told that it had a "negative connotation."

Like what?

"I didn't ask what it was," he said. "Once I heard it was negative, I didn't care what it was."

I care, of course, if only for the humor potential. But how do I find out if “dragonfly” has a pejorative meaning in Puerto Rico or the Dominican Republic? Who would know? Who to ask?

I decided to ask a Mexican. His name is Gustavo Arellano, a contributor for National Public Radio who actually writes a syndicated column called, “Ask A Mexican.” Don’t you just love America?

But Arellano was stumped. He said he knows of no other meaning for “Aguacil” and no negative connotation for “dragonfly,” except, of course, that most people want to whomp them with a large rock. But the same can be said of many political candidates, so Arellano was perplexed.

He also indicated that, if state officials felt the need to swap the ballots, they must believe that Spanish-speaking voters possess the IQ of a yam.

“It’s not as though people would believe they’re voting for a dragonfly,” Arellano said. “They would understand. It’s just one little letter.”

Besides, as My Guy the Fly noted, “Mistakes happen. And I’m sure I’ve been called much worse.”

Order the Telegram & Gazette, delivered daily to your home or office! www.telegram.com/homedelivery

Copyright 2012 Worcester Telegram & Gazette Corp.