

Caribou, not Lyndon, is home

BY JOHN ALBERT-MURCHISON
SPECIAL TO THE BDN

My mother called me over New Year's weekend, upset about a place called Lyndon and how Caribou is being slowly chiseled away in order to save on property taxes.

"What are they thinking?" my mother asked me in deep concern.

I've been trying to reason that out for some time, and I've been wondering what would happen if I woke up in a place called Lyndon because, as it happens, my house is in the claimed area.

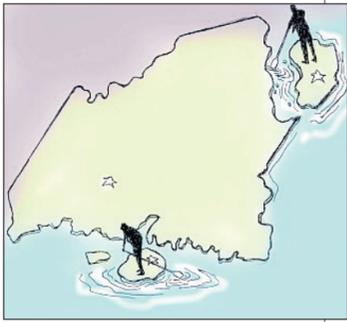
It's funny the things we take for granted in life until they are suddenly gone. Family is a great example. Once a family member has left this life, that void can never truly be filled again, so when our family starts talking about a place called Lyndon, my father's presence is keenly missed. He had an excellent sense of humor and a quick wit, so he would have found Lyndon to be quite funny. He probably also would say that it wouldn't work.

My father and mother set up a life in Caribou in 1955. He and my mother worked long hours to build a restaurant, a large family of five children and a future in Caribou. My sisters, my brothers and I took turns working in that little restaurant alongside them learning some of the lessons of life.

For instance, my father always voted. To him, government wasn't about "them," it was about "us." He believed that adults have obligations like that one. Obligations to pay their bills, help family and support their community. He also firmly believed in the achievements that came from hard work and was suspicious of gimmicks and schemes. If something was too good to be true, it probably was.

On the subject of taxes he was quite clear. Pay them. Don't evade them, avoid them or try to get out of them. Just "make do," pay them and "call it good."

"Making do" and "calling it good" really sums up Caribou and life in The County. Winter is difficult here, especially paying heating bills, but we make do and call it good. Back when highway construction ended in Houlton, instead of continuing north to us, we always "made do." When Loring Air Force Base evaporated before our eyes, we "made do" and "called it good."



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The community of Caribou was slowly built up over the years by hard work and people "making do" just like that. You see, communities, like families, aren't just about how much we get out of them. One of the first things they provide is mutual support. Maybe I will never need firefighters, EMTs or police officers at my door, but I know others will. Should we deny other people these services in order to cut taxes — property taxes that are on par with surrounding communities? In the end, supporting the community is a gain we all enjoy, even if it is indirectly.

Could Lyndon save me money on my property taxes?

My instincts and my father's lasting influence say no. Quite frankly, it sounds too good to be true. Many of the things we depend on in life will always need to be paid for somehow, or we'll simply have to go without. I'd rather have firefighters and police on hand now than risk all my worldly goods on some well-intentioned promises.

The alternative to our unity is letting our community die from
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This week in political Mad Libs ...

Remember Mad Libs? Here is a topical one: A small group of Americans, calling themselves _____, took to publicly owned _____ in protest. They declared they would not leave until their demands were met, specifically _____.

Here are several options: "Occupy Wall Street," parks, bank CEOs were arrested; "Black Lives Matter," streets, police officers were indicted. "Citizens for Constitutional Freedoms," park buildings, ranchers are freed. Offended yet?



MICHAEL CIANCETTE

After all, if the Internet were to be believed, the latter group is full of terrorists: "Yall Qaeda" and "Vanilla ISIS" are two of the more clever terms.

Of course, the reality is that each of these groups used so-called "direct action" to advance a political message. None of them are terrorists. None of them used violence or the threat thereof to induce political action. If that changes, they will become terrorists. But while the self-styled militia may carry weapons, as of today they specifically have disavowed the initiation of violence and have not harmed anyone.

Ironically, overbroad accusations of terrorism is exactly what led to the Oregon protest in the first place

The former two groups cannot say no one was harmed in their protests. Various "Occupy" encampments had rapes and sexual assaults reported in their midst, while private citizens had their businesses looted in Ferguson. But because that violence was not conducted to further political objectives, it cannot be called terrorism.

Nor did that violence make the movements' legitimate grievances invalid. Today, they are making good points about the disparate media coverage. Yet their arguments are undermined by shouts of "terrorism." Ironically, overbroad accusations of terrorism is exactly what led to the Oregon protest in the first place.

Maybe the Hammonds, the ranchers in question, are great people; maybe they aren't. But a relatively small agricultural burn — even assuming it were lit to hide illegal hunting — does not constitute "terrorism" to a reasonable person.

That is really the crux of the problem. In Congress' zeal to appear tough and "do something," they pass overly broad laws lacking clarity, such as the 1996 law under which the Hammonds were convicted in 2012 for federal arson. The petty tyranny of a faceless bureaucracy wields these laws with near impunity, leading to unjust punishments. That is why the original trial judge refused to levy the sentence — he thought it would be cruel and unusual.

That perceived injustice gave rise to the Oregon protest. And, in another ironic twist, unjust sentencing is one of the major objections of "Black Lives Matter." Who would have guessed these two groups would make common cause?

How do we solve it? Overall criminal justice reform, an area of agreement between the GOP and the president, would be a great start. Another solution is the establishment of clear, bright lines in the law, removing the vast swaths of discretion granted to agencies. When the law isn't clear, problems often arise.

That is one of the problems with firearms laws: They include terms of art subject to interpretation, not bright lines. President Barack Obama had an opportunity to propose a clear test to delineate between casual sales and business sales but instead threw out untrue statements such as "gun show loopholes" and "Internet sales." His actual "background check" order does little more than stir up gray area, likely leading to overbearing government action to be contested in
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Waste Not

How we can divert food from landfills to cupboards and food banks

BY CHRISTOPHER BURNS
BDN STAFF

Nothing takes up more space in landfills than food. This isn't just table scraps and coffee grounds. It's also whole fruits and vegetables and even canned food, not all of which is unfit to eat.

Americans sent a staggering 35 million tons of food to landfills in 2013, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, comprising 21 percent of all solid waste. Right here in Maine, about 28 percent of what Mainers send to landfills is food, according to a 2011 study by the University of Maine School of Economics. In 2013, this would have been roughly 325,242 tons of food.

Put another way, Americans spend \$166 billion every year on food they throw away, according to a 2012 study by two researchers from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service. Households on average spend \$936 per year to throw away 655 pounds of food, or about \$2.56 every day to toss 2 pounds.

All the while much of the food destined for landfills could feed the millions of Americans who struggle with food insecurity. One in seven Mainers has insufficient access to nutritious food, the 12th highest rate in the nation and the highest in New England, according to the USDA.

U.S. Rep. Chellie Pingree, a Democrat representing Maine's 1st District, has proposed an expansive bill, the Food Recovery Act, to reduce food waste from the farm to the kitchen cupboard.

It would expand tax credits for retailers and manufacturers that donate food, reduce liability for businesses that make donations and provide financial assistance for farmers and retailers to build facilities to store and transport donated food. It also would for the first time mandate uniform standards for food expiration dates.

But food industry insiders are mixed on whether the bill would have a significant effect on how producers and retailers manage food waste or whether it would spur them to divert more food toward hunger relief.

Throw away less

Many people, Pingree said, mistakenly believe that once food passes the date stamped on its label it's no longer safe to eat and needs to be thrown away. Not necessarily.

"The truth is that it's the manufacturer who comes up with those dates, and much of the time

the food is perfectly safe to eat well after the date has passed," Pingree said.

Manufacturers use best-by, sell-by and use-by dates to advise grocers and other retailers on how long food products should be displayed and when to rotate their stocks, according to the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service. Manufacturers also use date labels to advise consumers on when food likely has reached its peak quality, not when it becomes unsafe to eat. In fact, once food passes the date on its label, it's still safe to eat for a few days or even a few years depending on the product and how it's stored, according to the Food Safety and Inspection Service.

Under Pingree's bill, food containers would state that date labels are "manufacturer's suggestion only." But Pingree likely faces long odds in passing this provision into law. At least 10 bills introduced in the 1970s proposed uniform standards, and none succeeded.

While the federal government doesn't set a standard for date labels, aside from labels on infant formula, about 20 states set their own standards for select products, according to a 2013 joint study by the Harvard Food Law and Policy Clinic and Natural Resources Defense Council. Maine only sets a standard for date labels on shellfish products.

That study found misinterpreting food date labels is a significant contributor to food waste, accounting for about 20 percent of the food Americans throw away each year believing it was unsafe to eat. This means households on average throw out about \$187 in food each year because of misinterpreting date labels.

The study suggests a more uniform and clear date labeling standard, such as "best within XX days of opening," would better educate consumers about the quality of their food and reduce the amount of food sent to landfills.

Donate more

Another provision in Pingree's bill proposes larger tax credits as a way to encourage grocers and retailers to donate more of the food they can't sell.

A tax provision from her bill passed as part of the federal omnibus spending bill last month. It allows grocery stores, retailers and farmers to deduct the full value of the donated food from their federal tax liability, and it increases the maximum deduction from 10 percent to 15 percent of taxable income.

In 2010, nearly 43 billion pounds of food in gro-
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