

Trying to avoid election burnout

If we're being honest about how we feel about this election season, I sometimes find myself starting to fade.

On one side, I have my friends making a case for how Bernie Sanders is getting stifled by media bias. On the other, I have friends making the case for why your skepticism of Hillary Clinton is rooted in sexism.

I've gone through something resembling a grieving process to get

to the point of accepting that Donald Trump as president strikes anyone as a good idea and again through a similar cycle when considering Ted Cruz, who, in many ways, strikes me as even more of a terrifying bummer.

Then there are, of course, my Green friends, who remind me it's all a sham. We need a new system. We need to support Jill Stein.

When it's not the election burning me out, it is the whole world going to hell at the hands of religious extremism. Or, to be more precise, it is the reality television star/presidential candidate reminding us that the whole world is going to hell in this way. And it is the media gathering around this tail-eating snake, neglecting to report the truly catastrophic dangers associated with global climate change.

It's hard to make the case to a child that virtue is worth all that much if someone so committed to being without it is the front-runner for his party's presidential nomination

It turns out the former NASA researcher and forefather of climate change awareness says the effects of climate change, which are not only real and manmade but quantifiable and unquestionably upon us, are much worse than expected. Maybe you heard that recently. Then again, maybe you didn't. It turns out, despite being a banner year for climate-related news, the networks cut their climate coverage on the whole last year. ABC had a nearly 60 percent drop in its coverage last year, devoting only 13 minutes to a subject that is arguably the greatest and most complicated challenge we'll have ever had to face together.

But, hey. What's the latest on Donald Trump's fixation on his ... manhood?

Speaking of The Donald, my daughter hates him and not based on any imposed ideology. One day, he was on the radio, and she said he sounded really mean.

It's hard to describe Trump to a child, especially considering that a key part of getting kids ready for the world is teaching them to act with dignity and respect. Meanwhile, this guy has suggested that all women are gold diggers and on at least one occasion implied he's sexually attracted to his daughter. It's hard to make the case to a child that virtue is worth all that much if someone so committed to being without it is the front-runner for his party's presidential nomination.

Ironically, not long ago I was chastised by a number of readers for suggesting I let my young daughter watch the latest "Mad Max" film. Your kid is going to teach my kid to be vulgar, they said. But at least "Fury Road" has the undertones of a universalist message. Have you tried explaining an actual politician who calls women pigs to your kid yet? If your kid comes home thinking it's okay to be crass and act terribly, look no further than those on the road to the White House.

So, yeah, I'm exhausted, and I guiltily find myself tuning it out more or working later or listening to music instead of the radio or gravitating toward movies instead of checking out the news.

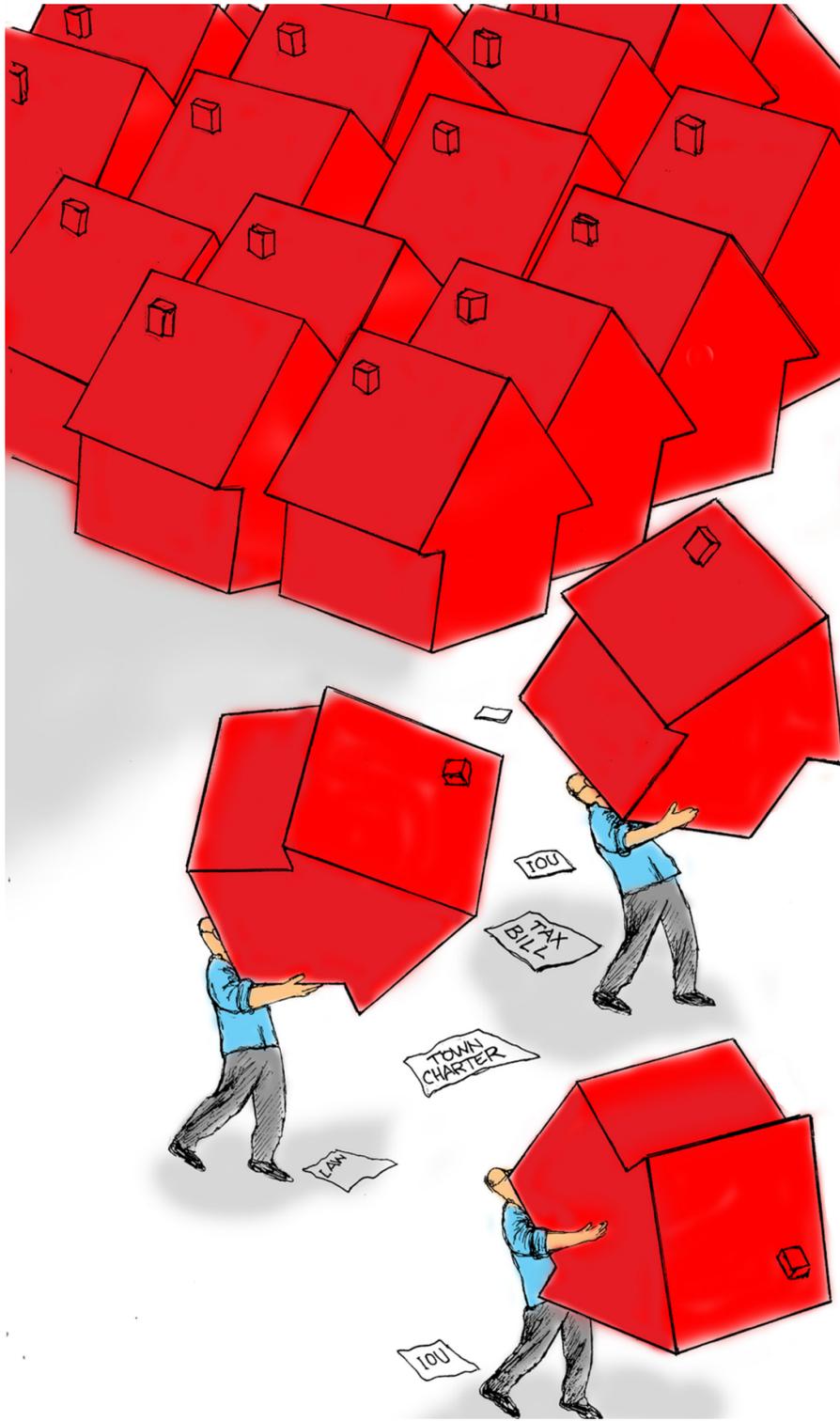
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The cost of home rule

For some Maine towns, deorganizing can lead to a much-needed tax cut

BY CHRISTOPHER BURNS
BDN STAFF

The tiny settlement of Cary Plantation in Aroostook County formed more than 120 years ago from a logging camp. Now residents say rising property taxes have made local control an expensive burden and that the time has come to join the vast Unorganized Territory.

It's a familiar story to many small towns on the edge. But with 218 residents, according to the 2010 Census, Cary might not be small enough.

Lawmakers on the State and Local Government Committee on March 9 rejected a bill that would have allowed residents to dissolve the plantation's government and deorganize, fearing that a cascade of other towns, desperate for lower taxes, would follow suit. Earlier that day, lawmakers gave the thumbs up to Oxbow Plantation, with 66 residents, to join the Unorganized Territory in Aroostook County.

"If successful, Cary Plantation will be the largest municipality to deorganize in the state of Maine, and its success will encourage larger and larger communities to deorganize," Maria McInnis, the fiscal administrator for the Unorganized Territory, said in testimony to the committee on March 9.

The size of the plantation shouldn't matter because Cary faces the same problems — high tax burden and a small tax base — as the smaller Oxbow, according to Kai Libby, Cary Plantation's first assessor.

Yet, towns of Cary's size seldom deorganize successfully. Out of the 42 towns that have deorganized in the last century, few had more than 100 residents at the time. At least two exceptions were Benedicta, in 1987, and Madrid, in 2000.

Under Maine law, there is no prohibition against larger towns from joining the Unorganized Territory.

Size can matter when towns with larger populations hand control over to state and county officials because the cost of delivering services to those residents is dispersed across others already living within the Unorganized Territory.

'A good fit'

For the 7,900 Mainers who live in the townships that dot the vast swath of Unorganized Territory, there is no local government. The state partners with the counties to deliver all services, such as tax collection, waste management and snow removal, formerly provided by the old town. Children are tutored to nearby school districts, or they attend one of three state-owned schools in the Unorganized Territory.

All taxpayers across the Unorganized Territory share in paying for these services, so residents often have lower property tax bills than their organized counterparts. Each time a town joins the Unorganized Territory, the cost for the state and counties to administer services increases. But the number of Unorganized Territory taxpayers also grows, so the territory can usually absorb a small town with minimal effect.

"Bancroft was a good fit for deorganization," said Paul Bernier, public works director for the Unorganized Territory in See Towns, Page D3

Playing the game of compromise in Augusta

Let's play a guessing game. We'll call it "Augusta." Party A has been advocating for a certain policy. Party B has been fighting against it. However, Party B determines it is publicly losing the argument and decides to offer a compromise it can live with based on Party A's proposals.

Time to guess: What reality does this hypothetical reflect?

It is a bit of a trick question. The answer could be about the Republicans' compromise offer on the minimum wage proposal. Or it might be the Democrats' choice to finally agree with several welfare reform ideas put forward by Republicans. Both answers fit.

Neither response answers the natural follow-up question: How should the Legislature proceed on these two matters? Sadly, it appears the answer to that question depends on the group with which you affiliate.

Those on the right have generally been receptive to the overtures of the "opposition"

Some on the left are abusing Democrats for even considering the Republicans' position on welfare reform, all while stridently opposing the proposed middle ground on the minimum wage. Consistent, sure, but I think you'd find many of them assail Gov. Paul LePage and others for an unwillingness to compromise.

Meanwhile, those on the right have generally been receptive to the overtures of the "opposition." There have been a few sharp jabs pointing out the "sudden" revelation of Justin Alford and Mark Eves, but Republicans have not denied their proposals. For example, with TANF reform, the GOP conceded to the Democrats on a few issues, such as a strict percentage limit on cash withdrawals.

On the minimum wage, there are several Republicans — such as Beth O'Connor and Heather Sirocki — who believe it is bad policy regardless. That isn't a surprise. Yet they swallowed their objections and voted to move a minimum wage proposal forward for consideration by the legislature. Isn't that the essence of compromise?

Other Republicans, such as Amy Volk, unabashedly support a minimum wage increase in a measured fashion. Some Democrats have thrown their own jabs, couching their reaction in incredulity at what they interpret as a marked change in position. Fair enough. That's the rough-and-tumble of politics. But, ultimately, politics is about advancing policy.

So what happened to this overture? House Democrats, except one, refused to even consider the Republicans' minimum wage proposal.

This is what is happening in Augusta. We continuously hear cries for "bipartisanship" or "compromise." One of the biggest gripes about LePage is what people perceive as a "my way or the highway" attitude. Yet when there is an opportunity to all but guarantee an increase in the minimum wage, many Democrats won't even let a committee look at an alternative proposal.

People will claim LePage has forced them to take this approach; even if true, it is irrelevant here. We don't have a showdown between the executive and legislative branches. This fight is internal to the legislature, where Republicans and Democrats have passed several budgets over the governor's veto. Why was compromise good then and bad now?

The simple truth is discretion can often be the better part of valor. When it comes to welfare reform, Republicans would be wise to reach some measure of agreement and lock in an 80 percent solution with the Democrats today. During the campaign season, they can take their case for See Augusta, Page D3