

Want food stamps? Maybe give up the ship

What do the U.S. Navy and a welfare asset test have in common? It's a strange question with multiple possible answers, I know. You could say something about corporate welfare or government waste — and you'd probably be correct. That's why "all of the above" is an option on many tests, and a reasonable person could conclude Gov. Paul LePage's proposed food stamp asset test also is correct.



MICHAEL CIANCHETTE

The food stamp asset test was enforced through most of Gov. John Baldacci's tenure, and it was only repealed in his administration's waning days. It does not apply to people's homes, clothes and cookware, or tools of their trade, be they farmland, taxis or lobster boats. It does apply to all-terrain vehicles, snowmobiles and cash exceeding \$5,000.

Some commentators have insinuated this asset test would negatively affect families with children under age 6. That sounds terrible. Fortunately, it's not true. The plain language of the rule states it does not apply to households with children under 18. So who does it hit? Adult men and women without kids.

"Adults with jet skis but no kids" are not likely to show up on anyone's list of "Maine's most needy." So why are people opposed to this? They have a few different arguments.

The first is, basically, people should not have to firesale their assets when they suddenly find themselves in need. It is a very reasonable point. Yet, since we have already established those affected by this change are adults without children, there is a logical question: how did they acquire these assets?

The answer is they probably had a job. Thousands in cash does not just appear, and snowmobiles, ATVs, and the like are not cheap to run or register. Why keep them if you are not using them? And if you were using them, you were paying that cost somehow.

The fact is, if you lose a job through no fault of your own, you are eligible for unemployment benefits averaging \$273 per week in Maine. Not luxurious by any stretch, but enough that a responsible, working-age adult could still take care of some basic necessities for a time, eliminating the need to sell assets at a fraction of their value — they can list it and wait for a fair offer.

Another rationalization states we need to let people keep their savings and provide food stamps. That way, they do not need to spend their own resources. It is a peculiar argument: why have a rainy day fund if not to spend during life's rainy days? Nevertheless, let us accept it for the moment.

If we want to provide people with benefits so they need not spend their own money, why bother with a food stamp-issuing bureaucracy at all? Why not send everyone a check directly and save the payroll cost? That is an

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GEORGE DANBY | BDN

Will LePage log a victory?

The governor wanted Good Will-Hinckley to start a logger training program. But will the school still implement it?

BY CHRISTOPHER BURNS
BDN STAFF

Gov. Paul LePage has taken a close interest in the happenings at Good Will-Hinckley since he took office. So when the governor started looking to establish a logger training program in early 2015, he approached Good Will-Hinckley about hosting it.

The logger training program receives a number of mentions in the 25-page report about LePage's actions surrounding Good Will-Hinckley's decision to hire Democratic House Speaker Mark Eves as its president.

The push for a logger training program comes at a tumultuous time in the forest products industry, which faces job losses, mill closures and competition from abroad. At the same time, pending retirements in an aging logging workforce have created demand for a new generation of loggers and training programs to prepare them to fill the ranks.

But LePage's initiative is on hold as he faces a legislative probe and a civil lawsuit surrounding his efforts to see to it that Democratic House Speaker Mark Eves didn't get a job as Good Will-Hinckley's president.

A new initiative

On March 3, LePage met with Good Will-Hinckley's interim president and board chairman and spoke about a role for the nonprofit in implementing a logger training program.

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Why our starting pay is \$15 per hour

Now that the campaign over a ballot initiative that would increase Portland's minimum wage to \$15 per hour has kicked into high gear, the rhetoric from both sides is sure to heat up. They'll exchange statistics, for sure, though they will be offered along with heavy doses of hyperbole. So, before we become too entrenched in ideological exchange, I wanted to explain why my company has enacted a \$15-per-hour entry wage.



ALEX STEED

Until our most recent hire, our workforce was only three partners and a number of contractors strong. When we posted openings for three-month internships earlier this year, we offered \$15 an hour as a starting wage. We did so because community stewardship is an important part of our company culture. We thought it important to take care of employees while helping to elevate the local compensation standard. We expect loyalty and hard work from those who work for us, and not only do we believe we should pay them fairly, we think that their pay should make these things possible.

It was not long ago that the partners in our company worked lower-wage jobs. Because of those lower wages, we typically worked for two or three employers at a time. We recognize that it is difficult to commit to a job and work hard when one's time and attention are divided in this way.

In a broader sense, we believe it's a moral imperative to provide a living wage, and we believe that we should pay creative Portlanders enough money to live in a city that feels increasingly unaffordable.

It seems as if many in middle management or ownership positions don't consider what they would gain in productivity in return for compensating their employees at a high wage. When I worked for the minimum wage or close to it, I remember friends and co-workers providing all sorts of rationalizations for underperforming and sometimes outright stealing from their employers. There is an incongruity between an employer giving very little but expecting a lot in return, and some employees tend to close that gap by stealing or giving their very least.

As owners of a company, there were urges we had to resist when making the decision to pay \$15 per hour. Most compelling is the urge to say, "I didn't make much when I started out, so you shouldn't either! It's good for your work ethic!"

It's true that my partners and I didn't make much when we were younger, but it's also the reason we're starting a company in our mid-30s instead of in our mid-20s. It took us each more than a decade and a half to become stable enough to contribute to the economy by way of entrepreneurship. How can you focus on starting a business when your labor and creative capacity are tied up in

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To become a better teacher, I changed my whole outlook

BY SKIP CROSBY
SPECIAL TO THE BDN

I entered the teaching profession so excited, so enthusiastic, so determined to change lives as my senior English teacher had changed mine. I wanted to look for that spark and fan it into a flame — a passion for learning that would let kids fulfill their dreams.

Then, in the blink of an eye, the reality of the classroom hit me. I couldn't believe the audacity of students not caring about each verb conjugation that I had carefully, thoughtfully and creatively prepared for them to memorize, practice and regurgitate.

It got worse. Midway through my first year at my second school, the principal entered my class-

room after school one afternoon and sat down. "I like you, Skip, and I know you are really trying, but I am getting complaints," he said. "If you don't get a handle on classroom management, I'm afraid I won't have any choice. I will not be able to renew your contract."

I was devastated. I was a third-year teacher. I mean, this was my dream job. My closest confidants had affirmed I was born to teach. How could this be?

Well, I decided it must be the school's fault, so I left and went to another school. It was a brand new school and a progressive ex-

periment in education that would try standards-based grading, heterogeneous grouping, a strong advisor-advisee group, performance-based pay — a place that valued and encouraged teacher voice.

It was a great place, and it still is. The problem was that neither I nor the students had changed. I still expected students to love what I taught as much as I did. I expected them to demonstrate how much they appreciated all my passion, hard work and dedication by paying attention, studying and learning Spanish. My response to their lack of appreciation was further frustration.

In 2003 I went through the National Board certification process, and my worst fears were confirmed: I stunk as a teacher. I

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Crosby



JOSEPH CYR | BDN

Cooper Willard steps off the bus at Houlton Elementary School for the start of the 2015-16 school year.