

## Why we can't talk about gun deaths

NRA pays for silence on any regulation

I was intrigued recently to discover the rhetoric of the modern gun debate, then in its infancy, in a March 1969 column in Playboy by then-Sen. Joseph Tydings, a Democrat from Maryland.

Tydings, who lost his seat after his first term thanks in large part to this stance, took to task the role and moral aptitude of the lobby that purports to speak on behalf of considerate and lawful gun owners.



ALEX STEED

"Sincere sportsmen, in whose ranks I

count myself, must realize that eventually, when enough gun atrocities are committed, the public will demand legislation so strong that our pleasures really will be endangered," he wrote. "No organization, not even one as powerful as the NRA, can intimidate for long in a free society. A gun policy that is insane for society is also insane for hunters. And the NRA serves its members ill when, instead of seizing the opportunity to help right gun crime regulation, it opposes all effective gun-control proposals."

There it was, the same argument in a debate that's nearly identical to the one I find myself engaging in non-stop since the publication of my column two weeks ago. For me, it's never been about guns but about the chilling effect brought to the debate and bought by an industry-specific lobby. If any other lobby helped to shift the conversation away from tens of thousands of deaths for which their industry has responsibility, they would be painted as Bond villain-evil. But this lobby, in particular, has been especially good at weaving the illusion of its necessity into our foundational narrative: We need access to guns to protect ourselves from an overzealous government. That is how we came to be in the first place. But who is the "we" in this scenario?

It's a narrative that reflects the selective memory of whites who fancy themselves potential protectors against an oppressive big government. It is part of our original myth — that of our God-like, heroic forefathers. We had to fight an oppressive government, and we might have to again. But it is not the whole truth. It paints a picture in which the white, gun-toting freedom fighter is the underdog. The victim. The reality, though, is that on the other side of that coin was the American Indian removed by the gun, the non-white enslaved and forced into bondage at gunpoint.

In his piece for Playboy, Tydings underscored the racial undertones (and, in this case, overtones) of the rhetoric employed in the NRA's argument:

"The NRA fights the most reasonable legislation as unconstitutional. And it appeals to the basest, most irrational prejudices of its members.

"For example, an editorial in The American Rifleman last year titled 'Who Guards America's Homes?' asked what would happen if a race riot broke out in your community while every American combat unit and the entire National Guard were overseas in a major war. What of the fate of citizens who may be trapped and beleaguered by howling mobs that brush police aside?"

The founding narrative based on liberation but stripped of oppression is not dissimilar from the right-wing tendency of featuring the founding fathers devoid of their slaves. In recalling liberation but not the enslavement or genocide that accompanied it, whites in particular subscribe to a self-serving narrative. To whom does the narrative about the good guy with a gun belong? Who has been victimized by being on the other side of that gun? What anxieties are we trying to stifle by pre-

See Steed, Page D3



GEORGE DANBY | BDN

## Trade talk

Maine has had a policy advocate for 11 years but with limited results

BY CHRISTOPHER BURNS  
BDN STAFF

Mainers had an opportunity to testify on the recently released Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement last week at a Bangor forum held by the Maine Citizen Trade Policy Commission. Those who testified claimed, by and large, the state had more to lose than gain by liberalizing trade along the Pacific Rim.

The sweeping trade pact covers 12 nations, including the U.S., that account for about 40 percent of the global economy. President Barack Obama's administration has argued that reducing tariffs and eliminating other trade barriers will boost commerce across the region, bringing with it large economic gain.

But those at the forum were concerned that tariff reductions — for footwear, in particular — would send jobs overseas. Others worried that local laws and regulations, such as GMO labeling requirements and mining restrictions, could be challenged in corporate tribunals.

For the last decade, the 16-member Citizen Trade Policy Commission has advocated for the state in debates over free trade agreements to ensure Mainers' concerns are addressed, but its efforts have been limited.

**Legislators created the commission 11 years ago out of concern that Maine was on the losing end of trade agreements.**

After the North American Free Trade Agreement passed in the 1990s, it became the poster child for how trade agreements were eroding manufacturing in Maine and across the U.S. A 2003 report commissioned by the Legislature concluded that while the North American Free Trade Agreement grew exports to Canada and Mexico and attracted foreign investment, Maine

sustained a net loss of about 800 jobs.

In response to growing anxiety over trade agreements, Gov. John Baldacci signed the commission into law in May 2004. The law charges the group with assessing the effect of trade agreements on Maine. The trade commission's members, including legislators, business owners, health care professionals, labor representatives and others, are appointed by the Senate president, House speaker and governor. It has a \$38,000 budget this fiscal year.

Maine is one of just five states with a legislative body that studies the effect of trade agreements. Legislators believed Maine would be better positioned than most states to assess the local effect of agreements and influence policymakers.

Additionally, the trade commission keeps Mainers informed of developments with trade pacts, such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership. The group also gathers residents' input and communicates it to U.S. trade representatives and members of Congress, aiming to give Mainers a voice in trade negotiations.

**Few states have trade policy commissions.**

Maine is one of just five states with a legislative body that studies the effect of trade agreements. Only New Hampshire, Vermont, Utah and Washington state have similar commissions, according to Public Citizen, a nonprofit consumer advocacy group. With the commission, legislators believed Maine would be better positioned than most states to assess the local effect of trade agreements and influence policymakers and U.S. trade representatives. In November, commission member Rep. Stacey Guerin, R-Glenburn, met with Kanji Yamanouchi, the economic minister of the Japanese embassy in Washington, and shared with him Mainers' concerns about the Trans-Pacific Partnership's potential effect on environmental standards and job creation.

With the background information acquired through the commission, Guerin said she had "an advantage" in that conversation, which hap-

See Trade, Page D3

## My Festivus grievances? Muslim ban un-American; supporting it isn't racist

This time of year brings countless holidays — some of the ancient vintage and others modern creations. "Seinfeld" Festivus falls firmly in that latter camp, and its traditions are highly relevant to this year's political season. Presidential candidates, for example, loudly proclaim the "Feats of Strength" they will unleash on their enemies, be they Republicans or terrorists.

Yet the "Airing of Grievances" seems especially appropriate, so, in the spirit of Festivus, here are mine.



MICHAEL CIANCHETTE

First, to those who are calling for a ban on Muslims, even temporarily. How many criticized the Obama administration over the last few years for its inability to get more Muslims into the United States? I'm referencing the Special Immigrant Visa for those Iraqis and Afghans who served with our military and face danger in their homes because of it. The State Department failed miserably in processing those applications. In 2011, it issued three; in 2012, 32. The agency's poor performance was rightly criticized.

When people call for a ban on all Muslims, they are calling for a ban on those who placed themselves in harm's way beside American troops. Such a ban is wrong.

The State Department even struggled to process a visa for an interpreter who served with Medal of Honor-recipient Dakota Meyer. In one fateful engagement, "Hafez" picked up a rifle and engaged Taliban militants alongside U.S. Marines. If you talk to those who have gone forward and served closely with local nationals — including yours truly — you will hear similar albeit less dramatic stories about their "terps." I have more trust and confidence in "my" Afghans than I do in some Americans.

So when people call for a ban on all Muslims, they are calling for a ban on those who placed themselves in harm's way beside American troops. Such a ban is wrong. That doesn't mean we cannot have a pause on emigres from specific countries, such as Jimmy Carter's Iranian sanctions or that we shouldn't significantly increase security screening based on threat profiles — we should. But judging someone solely on his or her faith, with no room for individuality, is un-American.

Second on the "grievance" list are those who call the first group "racist." Islam is not a race; that is axiomatic. Incorrectly ascribing things to race is either done by mistake or, worse, intentionally to elicit a visceral reaction. The former can be corrected with education. The latter cheapens legitimate debate by bringing unwarranted connotations into the conversation. Like tools, we need to use the right word for the right job.

That includes using the right words to name our enemy: radicalized jihadist Islam. Statements such as "ISIS isn't Islamic" ignore reality. It is OK to recognize virulent schools of thought within Islam — Wahhabism, Qutbism, Haghani — that teach violence as a means to salvation or as necessary to bring about the Islamic second coming. These philosophies do not represent the sum total — or even a majority — of Islam, but they are derived from it. Western leaders nonchalantly declaring them "not Islamic" is not effective.

Language is especially powerful in Muslim cultures. Words were their primary form of art because

See Cianchette, Page D3