

# Bangor Daily News

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## WHY THE FEDERAL BUDGET BILL IS GOOD FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

The massive spending bill passed by Congress last month contains myriad provisions. One thing it, fortunately, does not contain is language to block the Clean Power Plan, the Obama administration's policy to combat climate change by reducing pollution from power plants.

Overall, the spending package is a mixed bag for the environment. On the plus side — in addition to leaving the Clean Power Plan untouched — it extends tax credits for wind and solar power projects. It also reauthorizes the Land and Water Conservation Fund, an important source of money for local recreation projects as well as timberland conservation.

On the negative side of the ledger, it lifts a longstanding ban on U.S. oil exports, perpetuating a fossil fuel-dependent economy and its negative environmental consequences. It also flat-funds the Environmental Protection Agency.

The quick passage of the \$1.1 trillion budget bill and an accompanying \$650 billion tax package followed months of political grandstanding. Many of the Republicans' touted provisions — such as ending federal funding for Planned Parenthood and stopping the Clean Power Plan — fell to the more practical concern of avoiding vetoes from Obama and a government shutdown.

The environmental aspects of the packages showcase the give and take that took place among Democrats and the more conservative elements of the GOP.

The EPA released rules last summer that — for the first time in the United States — put limits on carbon emissions from power plants. The plan is an important part of the country's strategy to meet climate change targets recently agreed upon in Paris. Republicans in Congress objected to the plan before it was even released and immediately sought ways to stop it.

Sen. Susan Collins was one of only three Republicans in the Senate to vote against a Republican move to block the regulations in November. Sen. Angus King, an independent, also voted against the move, which passed but faced a certain veto from the president. Instead of doom the budget agreement, Republican leaders left their Clean Power Plan-thwarting efforts out of the bill — though the move prompted some conservative western lawmakers who strongly supported the end of the oil export ban to vote against the budget bill.

Democrats also angered conservatives by blocking a Republican effort to stop the Obama administration from contributing U.S. funds to the Green Climate Fund, an international fund in which rich nations pledge money to help poorer countries deal with climate change. The U.S. has pledged \$10.2 billion, about half of which it has paid. Although the budget deal doesn't include money for the fund, it doesn't keep the administration from taking it from elsewhere in the federal budget.

Another positive is the reauthorization of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which is funded through off-shore oil royalties. One part of the program supports community recreation projects, such as playgrounds, ball fields and swimming pools. Another, Forest Legacy, conserves large tracts of working forestland. Maine is the largest recipient of Forest Legacy funds and has two projects expected to soon receive funds.

And the tax package extended two important renewable energy tax credits, providing needed economic predictability for the development and growth of these renewable energy sources.

The spending bill and tax package, while far from perfect, support overdue efforts to diversify the country's energy mix and reduce the pollution that contributes to climate change.

## OTHER VOICES

### MODEST RESPONSE TO A REAL CYBERTHREAT

“Omnibus Funding Bill is a Privacy and Cybersecurity Failure,” the Open Technology Institute declared. “Last-Minute Budget Bill Allows New Privacy-Invasive Surveillance in the Name of Cybersecurity,” the Intercept blared. Why did Congress, in its year-end budget deal, slip in a measure that Gizmodo once called “the worst privacy disaster our country has ever faced”?

Because it's not. The Cybersecurity Act of 2015 is in fact a modest cybersecurity information-sharing law that tech alarmists in need of an outrage have painted as a grave threat to liberty. What these critics often fail to explain clearly is that the law is meant to clear hurdles for companies to share information on cyber-threats with the government — voluntarily. Among other things, the critics complain the measure doesn't require the government to obtain warrants for the information. That's nonsensical because the law does not call for coercive government data collection.

Moreover, the measure contains privacy protections, calling for personally identifying data to be scrubbed from the information companies send to the government and limiting how federal agencies can use the information. There are narrow exceptions to the privacy restrictions involving things such as responding to a threat of serious bodily harm or the exploitation of a minor. Critics also fret the law could lead to information going from private companies directly to the National Security Agency. In fact, the act designates the civilian Department of Homeland Security to serve as the hub for cybersecurity information

reporting. President Barack Obama opposed earlier versions of the measure out of privacy concerns. After the addition of privacy safeguards, the White House supported it and has now signed it.

The reality is that the data and privacy of Americans already are seriously at risk from an onslaught of cybertheft, intrusion and disruption, some of it by foreign governments and some not. The consequences: Millions of people have suffered the loss of credit card and personal data, corporations and other organizations have lost billions of dollars in intellectual property and sensitive networks of the U.S. government have been compromised.

The country remains at risk. Most of the nation's networks are in the private sector, but the government has sophisticated tools needed to detect and fight intruders. The government and business need to work together. Congress has dragged its feet for more than three years on this question of information-sharing, in part because the libertarian-minded online privacy activists rancorously oppose even baby steps that involve government action. This legislation is not a panacea for all cybercrime and disruption, but it should enable a long overdue process of business-government cooperation.

The act should be measured “against the daily invasion of our privacy by these hackers,” Rep. Adam Schiff, D-California, told the Associated Press. “Those who believe that [the] perfect should be the enemy of the good have to justify how they're willing to accept rampant hacking into our privacy and do nothing about it.”

*The Washington Post (Dec. 28)*



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Holiday celebration

Bangor City Councilor David Nealley recommended in his Dec. 26 Bangor Daily News letter to the editor a decorating competition in Bangor for December. What a great idea. But let's pick a symbol that harmonizes our community. While the Christmas tree might resonate with many, it doesn't represent all of our city, including plenty of school children, our co-workers and neighbors. For example, let's use a theme, such as “Season of Hope and Light,” symbolizing what helps us all conquer darkness and suffering.

Remember, when we are in the majority, it is really easy to say others shouldn't be offended. Let's make Bangor an exciting, receptive, lively, enjoyable and creative city where people want to live year-round, especially in December.

Annette Hatch-Clein  
Bangor

### Senior drivers

Amen to Diane Atwood's Dec. 26 BDN column about senior drivers. My aged uncle committed suicide in Ohio when his son took his car keys away from him. Uncle Stanley had been a lifelong delivery truck driver and knew every road in Cincinnati by heart. He was a widower and depended on his daily association with

his VFW and American Legion cronies for emotional and spiritual support. His loss of independent motility literally killed him.

Paul Haddon  
Dover-Foxcroft

### WRITE TO US

Letters must be 250 words or fewer and include a full name, town of residence and daytime phone number. OpEds may be 700 words. Letters may be edited or rejected for clarity, taste, libel and space. If a letter or OpEd is published, submissions by the same writer will not be considered for 60 days.

Letters may be sent to letters@bangordailynews.com. OpEds may be sent to OpEd@bangordailynews.com or P.O. Box 1329, Bangor, ME 04402-1329.

### Grasp climate change

Mark Anderson's and Tom Staley's recent columns illustrate that humankind won't grasp climate disruption until it understands four things: everything is related to everything else; the time frames we must adopt are millennia; humankind's effect on our common home is a moral consideration (Pope Francis); and severely limited knowledge about the first three demands humility.

Climate disruption is much more than fossil fuel abuse. The human population is too large.

Corporately fostered addiction to material consumption aspirations is unsustainable. Current economic models tout growth, allocate costs incompletely, entail corporate hegemony and inequality, and disproportionately weigh corporate political power (read, elections and the Trans-Pacific Partnership in this country). Disconnection from the biological world hides from consciousness our essential dependence on flora and fauna everywhere.

Much of our technology is inherently violent. For example, it is destructive of our soils and oceans. It pumps poisons into geological strata, endangering our aquifers. It leaves sulfite powder everywhere just waiting for water and oxygen to transform them into sulphuric acid. For a fifth of a millennium, we've disposed of the carbon byproduct of the fossil fuel we've used for power in the same locus, our atmosphere, to which carbon sequestered in the soil for millennia has been rerouted by big agriculture's indiscriminate deforestation and deep tillage practices. It's now proposed we contemplate a dramatic expansion of the unresolved spent fuel rod problem of nuclear reactors.

Alas, narrowly drawn thinking will only drive us deeper into the hole and assure us first prize for species brevity of earthly tenure.

Hendrik Gideonse  
Brooklin

## COMMENTS

Sun Journal writer Scott Thistle, “Addiction care at heart of latest push for Maine Medicaid expansion”:

MaineCare needs to be expanded for many reasons. One being many working, taxpaying residents are falling through the cracks. They make too much money to qualify for MaineCare and too little to be able to buy from the exchange — with one huge kicker in all this, they also don't qualify for a hardship exemption.

Thanks, GOP and Gov. Paul LePage, for making it impossible for some working people in Maine to purchase or qualify for health insurance in this state.

— Eibhlihin

Expansion would provide insurance for 70,000 hardworking Mainers.

At the same time, Gov. Paul LePage is trying to cut EBT benefits, General Assistance and any safety net people had. There would be less reliance on these programs if more residents were insured. Insurance = prevention = healthier residents = less hospital debt = increased revenue and jobs, all while the feds cover 100 percent through 2016. It's no brainer, which pretty much sums up this administration.

— rplntlover

It is not insurance if you don't pay a premium. It is an entitlement program — period.

— Bass Harbor

Unfortunately, people such as Gov. Paul LePage just don't care about the poor. They remind me of that oft quoted line uttered by Ebenezer Scrooge about dying and decreasing the surplus population.

— 66readerwriter

Just my opinion, but I think Gov. Paul LePage cares about the poor grandmother who lives on Social Security and needs help to buy food and heating fuel. But I think he doesn't care much about the 25-year-old heroin addict who lives in his mom's basement, doesn't work and instead staggers around in a methadone daze all day.

— BeInformed

For Gov. Paul LePage and Mary Mayhew, this is clearly

more about partisan political ideology than it is about the economics of improving health care access, decreasing uncompensated care costs, increasing state's GDP and creating health care sector job growth, that all studies show are happening in states that expanded Medicaid.

— Street\_Medic

People without health insurance are more likely to forego preventive care and delay treatment until what was once a minor treatable condition becomes life-threatening and expensive. That's when they show up in the emergency room.

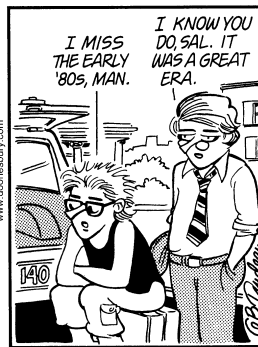
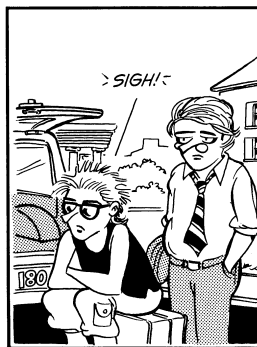
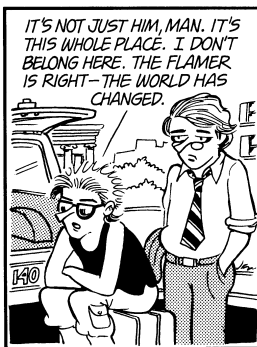
Yes, some hospitals are better than others. But if a person with a Cadillac health insurance plan shows up in the emergency room with a cough, they get all kinds of tests. If a homeless person shows up with lung cancer, they get a cough drop.

— Bob S

Enough with Gov. Paul LePage. This was a problem long before him and will continue to be for decades after he is gone.

— Jason Murphy

### DOONESBURY



### GARRY TRUDEAU