

# Bangor Daily News

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## A DIFFICULT BALANCE MAINE, VERMONT AND SANDERS ON GUN CONTROL

Maine and Vermont boast the two lowest violent crime rates in the nation, and they tie for second-lowest murder rate.

The two rural, northern New England states have something else in common: lax gun laws, including the lack of any license requirement to purchase a firearm; no background check requirement for private firearms sales; and no permit requirement to carry a firearm, either openly or concealed.

As Bernie Sanders challenges Hillary Clinton for the Democratic presidential nomination, the Vermont senator has been fighting back against claims from Clinton and her allies that his voting record on gun control is less than stellar.

Sanders' rebuttal sounds a lot like one that could come from a Maine politician. He holds up his home state and its culture of gun safety as a model. "I think the people of Vermont and I have understood for many years that what guns are about in Vermont are not what guns are about in Chicago, Los Angeles or New York, where they're used not for hunting or target practice but to kill people," he told NPR in April 2015.

While Sanders has voted for a range of federal gun control measures (and against others) in his time in Congress, he's indicated that gun control, at least to some extent, should be left to the individual states.

The difficulty with that position, of course, is that one state's relaxed gun laws — especially those related to the purchase of firearms — don't exist in a vacuum.

While Vermont and Maine have some of the nation's loosest gun control laws, they're located close to states with substantially tighter controls governing the purchase, possession and carrying of firearms. So it's no coincidence that law enforcement authorities in those nearby states — Massachusetts and New York — commonly recover guns whose origins they trace to Maine and Vermont. The gun flow rarely goes the other way.

One example: The Ruger P95 Boston Marathon bomber Tamerlan Tsarnaev used to kill an MIT security officer and wound an MBTA officer in 2013 four nights after the bombing was purchased outside of Portland.

In 2014, law enforcement authorities in Massachusetts recovered 85 crime guns with Maine origins and 25 with Vermont origins. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives traced the origin of 55 crime guns recovered in New York to neighboring Vermont.

New York and Massachusetts have some of the toughest gun control laws in the nation. They have license requirements to own a gun, and they require background checks for private sales. It's no coincidence that Massachusetts and New York respectively have the second and third lowest rates of gun deaths in the country. (Maine and Vermont both have gun death rates more than triple the Massachusetts rate and more than double the New York rate.)

But it's easy enough to purchase a gun in Vermont or Maine, get in a car and drive it to Massachusetts or New York. The fact that nearby states make it much easier to purchase a firearm helps to undermine the full effectiveness New York's and Massachusetts' gun purchase restrictions.

To be sure, Maine and Vermont pale in comparison to some southern states as the places of origin for the nation's problem guns. But the Maine and Vermont examples highlight the difficult balance Sanders would try to strike in advocating for some measure of federal gun control while leaving other decisions to the states — such as waiting periods on gun purchases.

Some aspects of gun control are legitimate issues to decide on a state-by-state basis — the conditions surrounding open and concealed carry of firearms, for example. But the laws surrounding gun purchases should be more uniform.

At a minimum, a Massachusetts resident needs a firearm identification card from his or her local police department in order to purchase and possess a rifle or shotgun. If that resident wants to purchase a handgun, he or she must also obtain a temporary "permit to purchase, rent or lease." Maine requires no such licenses.

The result of this patchwork of gun laws is that states seeking to address gun violence within their borders are subject to the whims — and often, inaction — of every other state.

## OTHER VOICES

### MORE WORKERS NEED 401(k)s

With the old-fashioned company pension now an endangered species, what besides Social Security will support Americans in retirement?

For many, the answer is a 401(k). The retirement accounts are offered by employers, but workers decide how much money they want to save. The amount is deducted automatically from their paychecks on a pre-tax basis, meaning the savings are taxed only when later withdrawn from the account, typically during retirement. Workers have a say in how the plan administrator invests their savings, and employers have the option to contribute to their employees' accounts.

Given these advantages, many Americans swear by their 401(k), but not enough get the chance to have one. Too often it's because they work for small companies that can't afford the accounts' maintenance costs.

For that reason, President Barack Obama will ask Congress, as part of his 2017 budget propos-

al, to make it easier for small businesses to provide 401(k)s. The administration believes that half of the 31 million people who work for an employer with fewer than 50 workers don't have access to a retirement savings plan.

If lawmakers OK the president's plan, rules on 401(k)s will be relaxed so that small businesses will have an easier time forming multi-employer savings plans to bring down costs. Companies with existing plans will be encouraged to offer them to long-term, part-time workers, in the hopes that they, too, will save for the future. Not so helpful is the Obama provision to hand out tax credits to employers that add 401(k).

Last summer a Federal Reserve Board survey revealed a shocking statistic: One-third of American workers have no retirement savings. Since there's nothing Democratic or Republican about an empty passbook, lawmakers of both parties need to get behind efforts to help more workers save for themselves.

*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (Jan. 27)*



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Bad news about Maine

I am a proud resident of Maine and am saddened by its declining population. But the Bangor Police Department made national news for all the right reasons with their blizzard tips for the mid-Atlantic region, unlike that (in)famous guy who works in Augusta.

Unfortunately, when I read the State section of the Tuesday edition of the paper I read the following headlines: "Fairfield woman held without bail"; "Dismissal of protection order approved"; "Couple indicted on murder charge"; "Husband accused of killing wife"; "Police seeking driver suspected of striking and killing turkey" (my favorite); "Woman charged in connection with hit-and-run"; "Man indicted in high-speed chase"; "Man accused of bomb threat at McDonald's"; "Two overdose deaths in two weeks"; "Woman pleads guilty to federal drug charges"; and "Four plead guilty in Dexter drug ring."

These are not good reasons for wanting to stay in Maine. I will switch from Cap'n Crunch to Cheerios and see if that helps.

Sue Whipple  
Hampden

### Food a human right

An enthusiastic group of Maine residents on April 30, 2015, visited the Legislature with a message: Food is a basic human right. The right to know what is in that food and who is producing it is part of that right. Thirty people testified about the right to food constitutional amendment, LD 783, put forward by Rep. Craig Hickman.

One of them was Joel Salatin,

a food hero from Virginia who came to Maine to support our efforts to get this amendment out to the voters for approval. He testified about the need to know what is in our food and where it came from.

He addressed the need to have that right enshrined in the constitution of the state: "The only reason the founders of our great republic did not include food rights alongside the right to bear arms, to speak and to worship was because no one at that time could have envisioned a day when citizens could not acquire the food of their choice from the source of their choice."

The work session for this constitutional amendment is Thursday, Feb. 4, in the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee. Please contact your representative, especially if they sit on this committee, before the session and let them know the people of Maine have a right to food of their choosing.

Betsy Garrold  
Knox

### 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.

### Keep landline service

In 2008, FairPoint Communications made the decision to

purchase Verizon's rural landline operation, becoming the provider of last resort in Maine.

FairPoint, which generates a third of its revenue from phone service, is investing in fiber-optic broadband service to business customers, which is showing the first signs of paying off. To support its broadband expansion, FairPoint has accepted federal Connect America Fund money to support its broadband expansion.

Its net income in the third quarter of 2015 was \$48 million and analysts at Zacks Investment Research in November gave FairPoint's stock a high rating. These positive financial trends have occurred while FairPoint maintains its role as Maine's provider of last resort.

What does this say to Maine residents? FairPoint is showing positive financial trends, has taken federal funds to expand its broadband network and yet it still wants to dump our rural lifeline service today as the provider of last resort. What are Maine residents to do when they are left with empty promises and no life-sustaining phone service?

FairPoint's corporate profile states it is dedicated to its customers; is a responsible, honest and caring provider and that customers choose FairPoint because it delivers the overall best value. FairPoint needs to stand up and prove that it stands by the thousands of Maine residents who rely on it as their provider of last resort.

Our legislators need to stand behind and support Mainers and hold FairPoint to its promise to deliver the best value to Mainers as the provider of last resort.

Bob MacDougall  
Augusta

## .COMMENTS

**Editorial, "Keeping poor in jail isn't justice, worsens overcrowding":**

The easiest way not to have this problem: Don't break the law.  
— *iTHINKsoTOOO*

Now the governor has a plan to reduce prisoner numbers: public executions of drug importers, preferably with the guillotine.  
— *roberthilpatrick*

I know several corrections officers who totally agree. Putting people in jail simply because they cannot make bail and are charged with minor offenses is a waste of resources.  
— *wasitsomethingisaid*

It's worse than a waste of resources — it's a massive failure. Rehabilitate those who can be and stop sticking society with the bill just to make a few

vindictive and sociopathic people feel good about themselves.  
— *lestyebejudged*

An arrest warrant over \$25 in fines? Even the suggested \$100 sounds ridiculous.  
— *wolfndeer*

I would agree with the option for a payment plan to pay off fines so as long as the state is not adding additional fees for choosing that option and the option is only for those who are too poor to pay the fine. Right now, if people can't afford the initial fine, the state adds a late charge. Then it may suspend driver's licenses, and in order to get their licenses back they have to pay an additional fee. Is it any wonder people who are poor can never get back on their feet?  
— *thegreatwandini*

If nothing can be done to collect the fine, there is no point in imposing it. Maybe laws that

warrant a \$25 or \$100 fine should be the subject.  
— *warmputtaptoo*

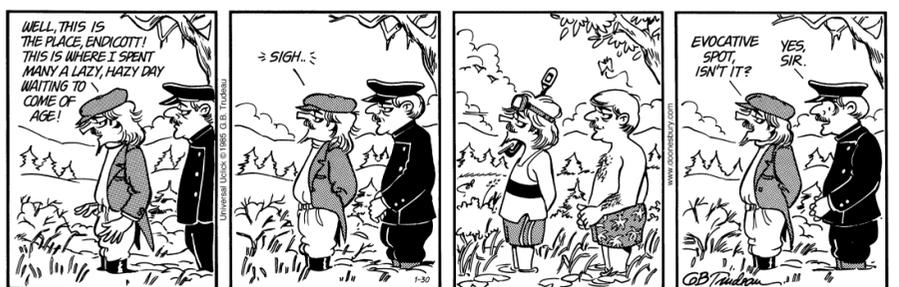
There are solutions that do not involve jail and do not involve throwing out the fine.  
— *hophead3*

Our law enforcement officials and judicial officials are starting to realize the disadvantages of maintaining a prison-industrial complex? I was wondering when that was going to happen.  
— *SMD*

Behave yourself and you do not wind up in jail. I do not feel sorry for any of them. There are bail bondsmen.  
— *Lucy Ball*

Spending hundreds to jail someone who owes a much smaller amount makes no sense.  
— *feingold-in-2016*

## DOONESBURY



## GARRY TRUDEAU