

# Bangor Daily News

Founded in 1889

SUSAN YOUNG  
EDITORIAL PAGE EDITOR

GEORGE DANBY  
EDITORIAL PAGE ASSISTANT

MATTHEW STONE  
OPINION PAGE EDITOR

P.O. Box 1329, Bangor, Maine 04402-1329  
Tel. 990-8000, fax 433-1048, email address letters@bangordailynews.com

## DRUG EPIDEMIC REQUIRES COMMUNITY APPROACH

Rutland, Vermont, unwittingly became the poster child for America's drug epidemic several years ago. The national attention, and a sense that their city had bottomed out, galvanized local residents and leaders to fight back. They formed committees, made lists of recommendations and, most important, set goals. Project Vision hasn't eradicated heroin from Rutland, but it offers a "take back our community" template other communities can model.

In Bangor, like Rutland, groups of concerned citizens have been meeting for years to address addiction in the area. A working group, created by the Bangor City Council in 2014, developed a list of specific, achievable recommendations. The Bangor Community Health Leadership Board, which helped coordinate a community forum in 2014 where the federal drug czar, Michael Botticelli, spoke of the need for treatment to help opiate addicts, is focusing on five of them. It has developed pain medicine prescribing protocols for use by local medical facilities. It pushed for a new local detox facility, which is funded in the drug legislation passed last month by the Legislature and signed into law by Gov. Paul LePage. It is seeking ways to make the anti-overdose drug Narcan more widely available. The group also worked with local lawmakers to draft legislation aimed at making treatment more widely available and effective.

Now, the group aims to spread its message about the need for treatment and acceptance of people with addictions — especially those in recovery — to the community as a whole. Community buy-in is an important element of the Rutland effort. So is the coordination of public health, social service and law enforcement responses to the addiction epidemic. A supportive governor and state government agencies also boost Rutland's work. On the other hand, many of the policy changes Bangor's groups have advocated, such as more widespread use of Narcan and an increase in medication-assisted treatment — along with an expansion of Medicaid to extend health insurance to poor Mainers — have met with opposition by LePage.

Project Vision, the group overseeing Rutland's rehabilitation, is headquartered in the police department, and staff from numerous social service agencies work there as well. This co-location ensures that local residents strug-

gling with addiction — or other co-occurring problems such as poverty, unemployment and mental illness — receive the services and support they need. The police arrest drug dealers but also recognize that directing addicts to treatment will be effective in reducing drug use.

"You can't separate child abuse, domestic violence and opiate abuse, because in many situations, it all resides in the same house," Rutland police Chief James Baker told The New York Times in 2014. "Now we'll set up an intervention, not just wait for something to happen."

His department also used data and mapping to zero-in on problem areas in the city of 17,000. They identified a 10-block problem area that was responsible for nearly three-quarters of police calls. Within this area, many former single-family homes have been divided up into apartments, which easily lend themselves to drug dealing, Baker said.

Much like LePage, Baker speaks of men from New York bringing heroin to Vermont to sell it for five times what they paid for it (and sleeping with local women, who get food and rent assistance). Arresting the dealers is part of the solution, but addicts who want help get it. Baker notes that a drug conviction can prevent an addict in recovery from getting a job, so his department directs addicts to help rather than putting them in jail. After years of resistance, the city opened a methadone clinic, which now serves 400 clients.

Removing problem properties, many of which are owned by absentee landlords, is another priority. Project Vision aims to reduce the number of blighted properties within the target area by half. The group has purchased a handful of properties. Some will be demolished, but the group hopes non-profits will rehabilitate others that will be sold to owners who will live in them.

There are small successes. Theft and burglary rates are down as are noise and disorderly complaints. Three blighted properties are being rehabilitated. There is no evidence yet that drug use has been reduced.

Like Project Vision in Rutland, Bangor's drug addiction groups have done commendable work and laid the groundwork for continued efforts to reduce substance use and address its consequences — even in the face of significant state-level obstacles.

## OTHER VOICES

### LEST WE BECOME GREECE, FIX DEFICIT

The omnibus budget deal and accompanying tax breaks for businesses and individuals that Congress agreed to in December will put a greater strain on the national debt, according to the Congressional Budget Office's latest budget and economic outlook for 2016-2026.

Under the CBO's forecast, the annual budget deficit will increase, as a share of the nation's gross domestic product, to \$544 billion — the first time it has done so since 2009, when the deficit peaked at \$1.4 trillion.

Revenue, as a percentage of GDP, will remain above the 50-year average, but still will not be able to keep pace with spending, with most of the expenditure growth going to Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program and Obamacare subsidies.

During the first seven years of President Barack Obama's tenure, the national debt has increased \$8.3 trillion (78 percent), and stands at \$19 trillion. That

translates to nearly \$71,000 per household, according to CNSNews.com, relying on U.S. Treasury and Census Bureau data.

Federal debt held by the public has increased from 39.3 percent of GDP in 2008 to 73.6 percent, an "already high level," CBO notes. CBO expects that to continue to rise to 75.6 percent this year and on up to 86 percent by 2026.

Federal borrowing for our sizable debt places an unfair burden on future generations, crowds out private savings and suppresses economic growth and innovation. This will only be exacerbated once the Federal Reserve allows interest rates to rise from their historic and artificially low levels, thereby substantially increasing our debt service costs.

Paying down debt may not be as sexy a presidential campaign issue as buying votes with a new spending program, but we need responsible adults who will tackle the issue, lest we wake up one day and discover that we are Greece.

*The Orange County Register (Feb. 1)*



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Poliquin's priorities

Whenever Rep. Bruce Poliquin's name appears in the news, I wonder how we have found ourselves with such a bland and insubstantial representative. To be honest, I've wondered what I might be missing; surely there must be more to one who has gotten himself elected. His latest proposition suggests there is simply not much to miss.

Poliquin is wasting Congress' time, proposing that food assistance be blocked for those convicted of terrorism. Poliquin concedes he cannot cite an instance in which a convicted terrorist has received SNAP benefits. Poliquin's office counts 49 convicted terrorists in U.S. prisons who may be released by 2041. The national average monthly benefit for those receiving food assistance was about \$125 in 2015. Simple arithmetic demonstrates that if all convicted terrorists received the full benefit, the cost would be infinitesimal compared to our \$3.8 trillion budget, on the order of 0.000002 percent, costing me about one-thousandth of 1 cent on my 2014 federal taxes.

Poliquin's meaningless grandstanding is a rather transparent strategy. He gets his name in the news, suggests he is actually doing something for Mainers and invokes terrorism to perpetuate fear in the voting public.

**Martin O'Connell**  
Bangor

### Bangor bus connects

Like many readers, I was struck by the commitment shown by two Community Connector drivers who made phone calls and knocked on doors to check on the welfare of a regular passenger who failed to show up for several days in a row, as the BDN reported Jan. 29.

As a regular bus rider, I was not surprised. Our drivers have a difficult job. But when you ride regularly, they take the time to learn your name, stop and regular schedule. When you ride the bus, you're never just a fare.

This kindness and inclusivity characterizes fellow passengers, who without prompting will help you on or off the bus with strollers, walkers, or shopping bags. They'll share a smile, make a joke, give a compliment and commiserate about the weather. Like many regular riders, I have a diverse circle of "bus friends" — people who enrich my commute, brighten my day and who I might never have met otherwise.

In so many ways, the bus is our Community Connector.

So if you're tired of battling bad weather, crazy drivers and

tight parking, ride the bus. You'll find your commute gives you a chance to prepare for a busy day or unwind from a stressful one. You can read, knit, listen to music, meditate and even nap. (Once you're a regular, someone will wake you when your stop approaches.)

The bus is affordable, reliable and — for all but the terminally impulsive — surprisingly convenient.

Why not give it a try?  
**Lisa Feldman**  
Orono

### 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.

### TPP will bypass courts

TransCanada Corp. on Jan. 6 said it would seek \$15 billion in damages over the U.S. government's rejection of the Keystone XL tar sands pipeline. TransCanada is suing the U.S. through the investor state settlement dispute arbitration system set up under the North American Free Trade Agreement. If the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade pact — which has been described as NAFTA on steroids — is approved, these cases could become more common.

The investor state dispute settlement system lies at the heart of this trade agreement, which will be fast tracked through Congress with no amendments whatsoever. The implications of this private legal system just for corporations is frightening because through these tribunals corporations could bypass our judicial system.

Is endless litigation and fear of litigation the best vision we have of the future? That \$15 billion in damages TransCanada is seeking will be just the start of our tax money funneled into that corporate pipeline that doesn't like anyone telling them what they can't extract.

**John Gornall**  
Garland

### DEW no animal haven

I am writing regarding George Smith's Jan. 27 BDN column on the DEW zoo. DEW Animal Haven is no haven for animals at all; it is an inadequately regulated roadside zoo.

"Yankee Jungle," Smith and Maine's press corps should stop whitewashing this sad facility and misleading the public. DEW contributes to the crisis of exotic animal proliferation and abuse across the U.S.

In 2014, DEW charged \$50 per person to pet three baby tiger cubs, one of whom died from a congenital neurological condition. White tigers are the result of constant in-breeding, so this outcome is common.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture license that roadside zoos, such as DEW, hold does not mean the facilities meet professional standards or adequately protect public safety and animal welfare.

There is an urgent need for new regulations and legislation that prohibit the private possession of exotic animals and bring an end to the breeding, selling and display of exotic animals at depressing roadside zoos, which can't begin to provide the wild animals they cage with the space or quality of life they deserve.

**Karen Coker**  
Cape Elizabeth

### Racial profiling

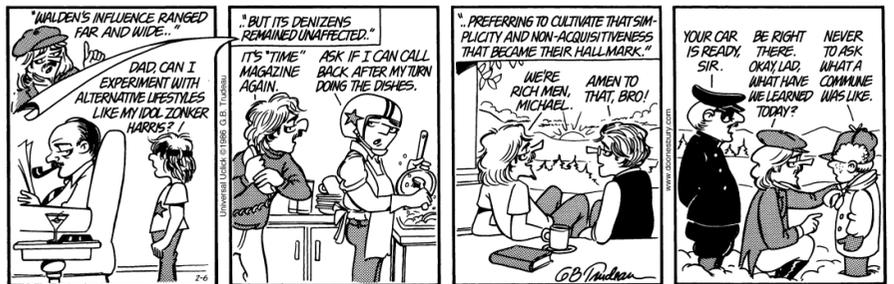
The situation Toussaint St. Negritude, poet laureate of Belfast, found himself in while walking home from the Liberty Library on Jan. 7 and confronted by a Maine State Police trooper can only be called "walking while black." That the trooper asked Negritude where he was coming from, where he was going, how long he had lived in Maine, if he was living with friends and repeatedly whether he had "knives or weapons or anything like that," all the while with her hand on her service pistol, does not support the Maine Department of Public Safety's position that the trooper stopped Negritude "out of concern for his safety."

One can only imagine what went through Negritude's mind, as a black man living in the whitest state in America, given the backdrop of false arrests, overrepresentation of black men in our criminal justice system and the police shootings of unarmed black men, teenagers and even a child. While there may be some dispute as to how long this incident lasted, no law enforcement dashboard camera can capture the fear of someone in Negritude's position that night.

The Maine Department of Public Safety would do well to provide diversity training for its troopers. No doubt law enforcement is a high-risk profession. Living in America is high risk for black men. Black lives matter.

**Kendall Merriam**  
Inaugural poet laureate  
Rockland

## DOONESBURY



## GARRY TRUDEAU