

Bangor Daily News

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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

RISKS AND REWARDS CHOOSING WHERE TO SEND OUR TRASH

The Bangor City Council’s vote on Monday to send the city’s garbage to a yet-to-be-built plant in Hampden marks a milestone for the company vying to build that facility. Maryland-based Fiberight now has a commitment from the largest city in the region with the most trash.

But perhaps the most appropriate way to view the City Council’s 7-2 vote is as a vote in favor of the 25-year-old municipal partnership, the Municipal Review Committee, that would serve as Fiberight’s landlord and as chief overseer of the operation for the towns and cities that send their waste to Hampden.

Over the past month, the city council has entertained two options for Bangor’s garbage in 2018: Fiberight, or the facility where the city has sent its trash for nearly three decades, the Penobscot Energy Recovery Co. incinerator in Orrington.

Both options carry risk. With Fiberight, the risk comes with the uncertainty surrounding the permitting, construction, startup and economic performance of a new facility that would be the first of its kind to operate on a commercial scale in the U.S. Fiberight and its investors, led by waste-to-energy giant Covanta, would cover construction costs, estimated at \$67 million. But the towns would commit \$18.5 million — from a fund that has accrued over the years from their share of PERC profits — to prepare the site for development and to cover a range of contingencies.

With hopes of starting construction this summer, Fiberight has yet to secure its permits from the Maine Department of Environmental Protection, which recently requested additional information from the company, including clarity on Covanta’s role in the project, how much wastewater the facility will discharge and the products it plans to sell.

With PERC, the risk comes from the facility’s long-term economic uncertainty. In 2018, a contract that has long guaranteed PERC above-market rates for the electricity it produces expires, meaning PERC would need to make up the revenue by charging towns higher fees for every ton of garbage. PERC would start towns at \$84.36 per ton for 15 years; the Fiberight rate would start at \$70 before rebates. Currently, the net rate at PERC works out to \$59 per ton.

In order to stay viable, PERC says it plans to scale back operations, accepting 200,000 tons of garbage annually, down from more than 300,000. PERC would operate for two shifts daily instead of

three, cutting labor costs and reducing maintenance spending due to less equipment wear, its managing partners say. On its new schedule, PERC says it will produce and sell power at times of peak demand in order to maximize revenue — generally the morning and evening hours.

The strategy is technically feasible as long as the plant’s boilers don’t shut down and remain hot enough during the night shift, but the industry standard is to run incinerators 24-7, said Jeremy O’Brien, director of applied research at the Solid Waste Association of North America. The electricity strategy is also unusual but technically possible, said Marco Castaldi, a chemical engineering professor at the City College of New York. Boiler operators shouldn’t time combustion of refuse to correspond with high market prices; the flow of refuse-derived fuel into the boiler would need to remain steady, Castaldi said.

But, similar to Fiberight, PERC also faces unknowns about its operating plan, given that it’s uncommon.

Faced with two imperfect choices, the Bangor council opted for the waste plan to which the Municipal Review Committee is integral. The committee currently represents its 187 municipal members as part of the limited partnership that runs PERC. PERC’s 2018 plan didn’t provide for an MRC role, though PERC’s managing partners say they’d welcome an organization representing its municipal partners’ interests on its board.

Over the past several years, the MRC has taken on the role of seeking out a new solution for the region’s waste, negotiating the terms with Fiberight and securing waste commitments from its members. If Fiberight fails, the MRC would continue to own the Hampden land and could seek another waste solution. The interim backup plan is to haul waste to Crossroads Landfill in Norridgewock; the backup for PERC is Juniper Ridge Landfill in Old Town, but no MRC backstop.

The MRC process was imperfect. The group worked on its post-2018 plan without much publicity as it solicited and reviewed 15 proposals and ultimately settled on Fiberight’s. Bangor Councilor Ben Sprague said Monday it would have helped if municipal officials were kept more in the loop throughout that process.

Ultimately, Bangor settled on a plan with MRC as the backstop. The towns that have yet to make their choice will decide between an unknown entity with MRC’s backing or a known entity with a less known future.

OTHER VOICES OVERSIGHT OF RAIL CARGO FAILING

An alarming report issued by the federal Transportation Department’s inspector general concluded that regulators are failing to adequately safeguard the nation’s freight rail shipments of crude oil and other hazardous cargo.

The audit, released last week, concluded that while there had been a significant increase nationwide in rail shipments of crude oil — from 9,500 carloads in 2008 to 407,761 in 2013 — the Federal Railroad Administration did not conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the risks associated with the shipments. The report said the agency does not take into account such significant factors as the condition of the infrastructure, shippers’ records of complying with regulations and how close the rails are to population centers.

Those findings are bad enough, but the audit also determined that, even when regulators go

after violators, they don’t do a good enough job.

The report said that, while regulators pursue civil fines for violations regarding hazardous materials, they do not adjust the sums based on the severity of the infractions or refer cases for criminal investigations. Based on a random sample of violations issued in a five-year period, the inspector general estimated that 20 percent of violations may have warranted but did not received those referrals.

That means even firms that were paying for violations might have been unjustly avoiding higher fines or, worse, criminal prosecution.

The audit’s conclusion said it all: “Effective oversight of this risk prone area requires thorough, timely inspections as well as the application of deterrent penalties when violations occur.” Focused, forceful oversight is imperative.

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (March 1)



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Garrett’s struggle

A sincere thanks to Bangor Daily News editor Erin Rhoda and the BDN for the sensitive and thought-provoking article about Garrett Brown, who died too soon from a drug overdose but left a legacy to help others.

Rhoda outdid herself in tactfully presenting all of the factors that can surround the life of those addicted, their families and the “system.” My sincere condolences to Garrett’s family and loved ones.

Pat Martin
Bangor

Arctic coast protection

I am saddened that Rep. Bruce Poliquin recently voted against protecting the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge as wilderness. Poliquin joined 226 other members of the House in voting against an amendment to the Sportsmen’s Heritage and Recreational Enhancement Act that would have protected this land.

The refuge is truly one of America’s last wild places. Its coastal plain supports large populations of caribou, polar bears and more than 135 species of migratory birds from all 50 states that congregate there each summer.

Each year, here on Maine’s coastline, we can see semipalmated sandpipers that may have spent the summer in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

As part of our public lands system designated for use by all Americans, I hope Poliquin will support protection for the coastal plain in the future.

John Demos
Northeast staff
Alaska Wilderness League
South Berwick

Property rights

I have but one simple question of private property rights advocates, especially those who oppose a generous gift of land to be set aside for the enjoyment of all people in northern Maine as a national park and recreation area: Why is it so acceptable for one landholder to decide what to do with his or her land if he or she wants to harvest resources from it, but not acceptable for another landholder to decide to preserve his or her land from such use, by whatever means available to them?

Land ownership is an illusion, anyway. As the saying goes: “We do not inherit land from our ancestors. We borrow it from our descendants.”

Kathy VanGorder
West Tremont

Supreme Court fight

Since 1971, there has been a

conservative majority on the Supreme Court. With Justice Antonin Scalia’s vacancy, there is now a split of power. There are four liberals and four conservatives (one of whom occasionally sides with the liberal justices). This means that as it stands right now, liberals hold at least equal power, maybe a little more. On a bipartisan front, this is more power than they have had in decades.

I would like to see a President Barack Obama nomination placed on the Supreme Court, but it is very unlikely. There is enormous pressure on the Republicans to block any nomination, and if they do so, it will likely cause them problems for congressional Republicans running for re-election in November. Also, our chances of electing a liberal president will likely grow even stronger. So things are not looking that bad for liberals right now.

Senate Republicans will do what they want, and they really don’t care what anyone thinks. Let the Senate Republican do as they please; they have finally painted themselves into a corner.

Linda Peek
Lewiston

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.

Community fisheries

Maine’s current distribution of National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration disaster funds has the potential to compromise community-based fisheries. Without adequate input from all stakeholders, this unfair process could undermine the efforts of the health care sector to source fresh, locally caught seafood.

Health Care Without Harm’s Healthy Food in Health Care Program supports New England hospitals in their efforts to promote a sustainable and equitable local food system. Our network of 153 health care facilities represents 57 percent of all hospitals in New England and about \$20 million in annual food spending.

Seafood is an important source of lean protein, and hospitals from Rhode Island to Maine are serving seasonally available, underused species in order to protect our ocean resources and support our local

fisherman. As the supply chain infrastructure has improved, demand for this fish is only increasing. We are concerned that the allocation of NOAA funds thus far is a missed opportunity to support community-based fisheries.

We encourage the Maine Department of Marine Resources to follow the same protocol as other states that have received this relief funding, and organize public hearings for fishermen and the public to participate in an open process about how to fairly allocate the last of the available funds.

Maine should create an open and transparent process, and it should ensure that the community-based fisheries affected by the disaster are given access to the funds.

Jennifer Obadia
Eastern U.S. project director
Healthy Food in Health Care
Health Care Without Harm
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Stockton Springs fix up

After reading in a Feb. 27 BDN article about the fight over the fate of a house in Stockton Springs, I wondered what might happen if the community got together and helped Hollie Ann Beal fix up her house. Perhaps some of her “wealthy” neighbors, who complained about its appearance, would pitch in and give her a hand.

The Board of Selectmen could cooperate by acknowledging her efforts to renovate the property and giving her time to complete the work. What a wonderful community effort it would be.

Janbe Keegan
Winter Harbor

Trump a proven leader

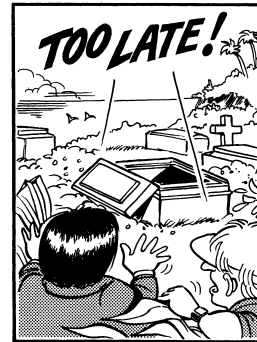
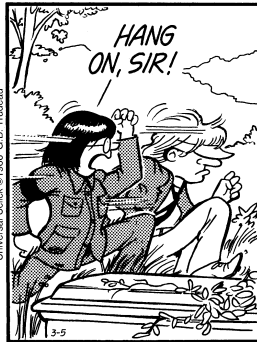
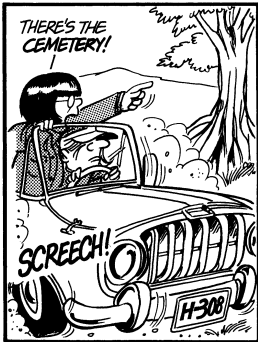
How is it Marco Rubio is being praised for his recent attacks on Donald Trump, and people wonder why he didn’t attack Trump sooner? Then, in the next breath, media critics wonder why the presidential race has become raucous and out-of-hand? Do you detect just a bit of hypocrisy?

Trump is generating support because the American people are sick and tired of Washington politicians and their antics, such as Obamacare, the failed economy, backroom deals, the Iran deal, the loss of jobs, companies moving overseas and illegal immigration.

Although he is trashed for his raucous behavior, Trump is looked upon by as a proven leader and honest dealmaker and trader in the eyes of his followers who continue to multiply.

Bob Leeman
Brewer

DOONESBURY



GARRY TRUDEAU