

# Bangor Daily News

Founded in 1889

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## STATE EMPLOYEE PAY

### RAISES SHOULDN'T BE A POPULARITY CONTEST

Lawmakers are considering proposals to give pay raises to several groups of state employees, including law enforcement officers and workers at the Riverview Psychiatric Recovery Center. Strong arguments were made in favor of the pay increases, but having lawmakers pick which employees are worthy of raises isn't the best way to determine if state pay and benefits are adequate to attract and retain state employees.

Lawmakers should amend one of the pay raise bills to create a panel to review state employee compensation and assess its impact on state government job vacancies, recruitment and retention. Comparisons to the private sector and other states should be part of this review. If they determine higher pay and/or benefits are needed, the group would develop a plan to implement — and pay for — the increases.

The arguments for raising wages for state police, wardens and other law enforcement personnel are familiar: Without better pay, the state can't attract and retain enough people to fill openings. Some community police departments pay higher salaries than the Maine State Police. One young trooper told lawmakers earlier this week that he was leaving the force to work for the Department of Homeland Security, where he will earn more money to support his family.

LD 1653, sponsored by Rep. Ken Fredette, R-Newport, would raise salaries by 12 percent to 18 percent for the Maine State Police, Marine Patrol and Warden Service.

The situation is especially dire at Riverview, where the retired Supreme Court justice who oversees the state's compliance with a decades-old mental health system decree warned in February that job vacancies there threatened the state's ability to comply.

As part of the solution, Sen. Roger Katz, R-Augusta, proposes, in LD 1645, raises of \$2 to \$4 an hour for direct care workers at Riverview and the Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Center in Bangor.

While both bills received strong support in public hearings, it is worth remembering that Maine's low government pay didn't happen by accident.

A freeze on merit and longevity pay increases for state employees began on July 1, 2009, under former Gov. John Baldacci and continued under Gov. Paul LePage. In 2013, LePage's then-finance commissioner, Sawin Millett, warned that a lack of raises hurt the state's ability to recruit and retained qualified workers.

"The number of qualified applicants and the desire for them to move within state government has been somewhat exacerbated by the lack of merit increases over time," he told the Appropriations Committee in 2013. The Legislature subsequently lifted the freeze, and it had to override a veto from LePage to do it.

The governor himself raised similar complaints about high-level state employees. In fact, he raised the pay and increased vacation time for numerous cabinet appointees and executive branch staff.

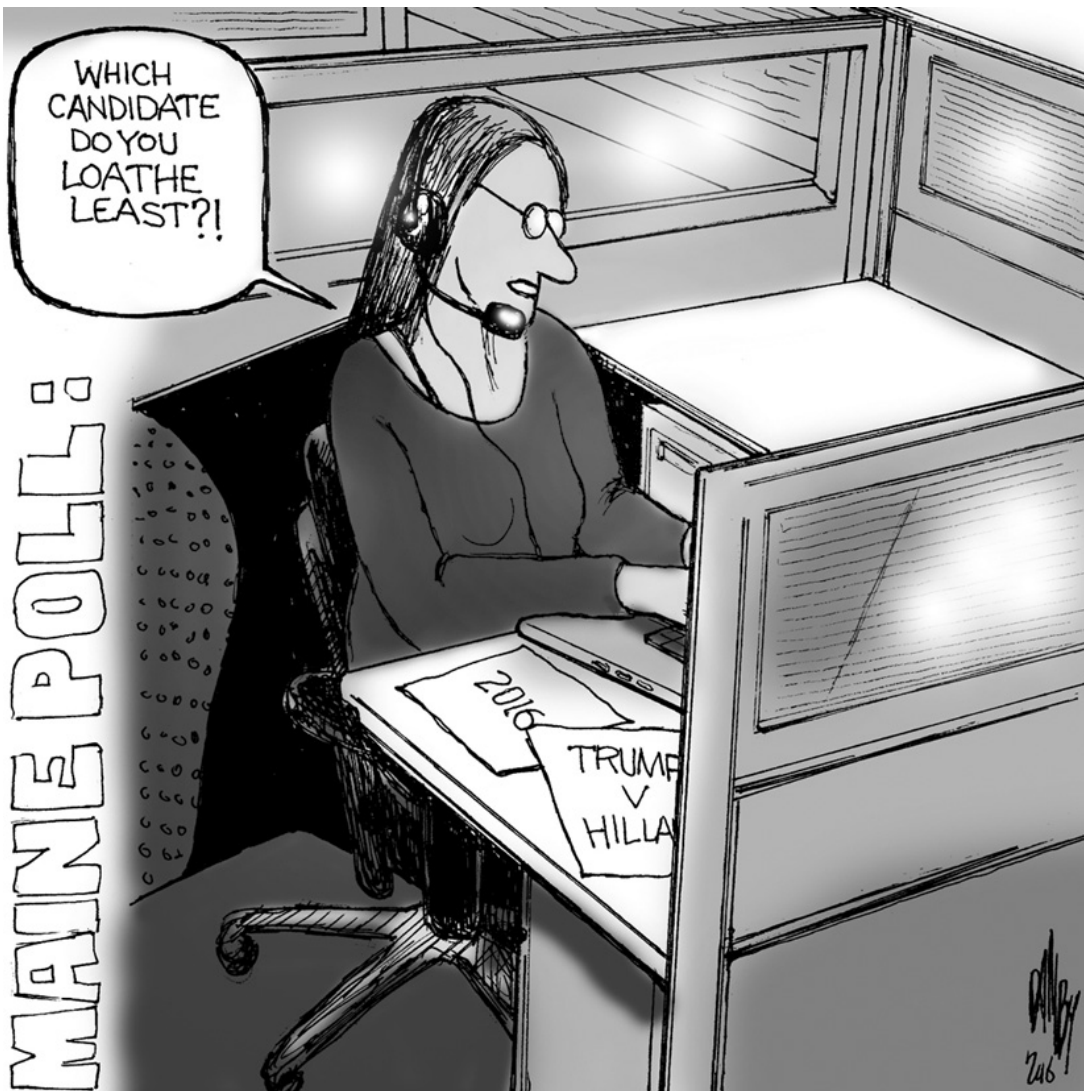
Rather than the piecemeal approach LePage and lawmakers are currently using, there should be a more comprehensive review of state salaries and benefits to determine if they should be adjusted.

During testimony on the law enforcement raises, Peter Mills, executive director of the Maine Turnpike Authority, brought up the prospect of regionally adjusted wages for state positions. Because housing costs make up a significant share of a family's costs, Mills rightly suggested the state consider adjusting salaries based on where a job is located. Employees in more costly urban areas, he said, need higher salaries to cover living expenses than their counterparts in rural areas.

Mills told lawmakers that the Turnpike Authority was able to pay its maintenance workers \$18 an hour to compete with salaries in southern Maine. The Department of Transportation, on the other hand, paid only \$12 and was forced to close maintenance garages and contract out work in southern Maine.

Regional and other types of adjustments should be part of a state salary review.

A thorough review of state compensation and its consequences on all levels of state employment is overdue. That would be a better way to decide what salaries and benefits should be adjusted than a legislative popularity contest.



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Danby's cartoons

George Danby's editorial cartoons are always current and bitingly satirical. Nothing illustrates his news sense and his artistic ability to portray his point as much as his March 13 cartoon.

The subtlety and the power of this drawing showing Donald Trump with the obligatory U.S. flag lapel pin are brilliant. As many of you may already know — the American flag flown upside down is a signal for distress.

Bangor Daily News readers are lucky to have Danby.

**Gary Guisinger**  
Perry

### Second Amendment

I read with dismay Steve Perrin's March 21 BDN letter to the editor about rethinking the right to bear arms. His misunderstanding of the Second Amendment was scary. He states that our right to keep and bear arms was never absolute. Then why is it the Second Amendment, right after the right to free speech and assembly? He maintains we have "professional defenders" in the form of local police, ignoring the fact that these defenders have been shooting innocent civilians because of their race.

What liberals such as Perrin refuse to understand is that our Founding Fathers were keenly aware of every government's need for power over its citizens. A well-armed militia, therefore, was vital for citizens to protect themselves from their government and its tyrannical instincts. Remember the American Revolution?

The threats to citizens from mass murderers and terrorists have never been more serious. Why, then, are liberals so desperate to disarm Americans? Just study the lives of Joseph Stalin, V.I. Lenin, Adolf Hitler and Pol Pot to find the answer.

Perrin's sneaky logic is typical of gun haters. He reasons that because we have an army and local police, we don't need a militia. Therefore, citizens have no need to own guns. The fact that criminals have powerful handguns and automatic rifles is completely lost on liberals. It is sad they can't comprehend the deep connection between self-protection and freedom.

**Peter W. Earl**  
Fort Fairfield

### Women's basketball

Judging by the record, the assessment of the University of Maine women's basketball team's postseason fortunes in

Pete Warner's March 22 BDN article seems to be accurate. But this is Maine, and we don't need national attention. We want good basketball, and that is what the UMaine women have delivered. They have been a joy to watch.

It's too bad the team couldn't have played Quinnpiac here on March 18 because it might have been a totally different outcome as on paper they were fairly even. We will surely miss our seniors and congratulate them for an awesome four years.

Here in Millinocket, we watched Sigi Koizar take a good team and make it great. So we are looking forward to a new season as the future looks bright indeed.

**Bob and Hope MacDonald**  
Millinocket

### 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.

### UMaine students at risk

More than 60 percent of the University of Maine's 9,300 undergraduate students live off campus, according to UMaine. This doesn't include graduate students and the many university employees who must commute to the Orono campus daily.

That's a very high number of lives that the UMaine administration shows a lack of concern for by repeatedly operating under normal conditions during extremely inclement weather. Time and time again, Maine is hit by storms that bring high winds, snow, ice, sleet and low visibility that result in unsafe driving conditions. While local school departments and businesses cancel and emergency personnel urge drivers to stay off the roads, UMaine students and staff are expected to report to campus.

As both a student and employee at UMaine, it's a very unsettling feeling driving to Orono from Bangor in inclement weather. Even if I don't feel safe or can't physically drive in the weather, I'm still expected to be there. Students may miss an exam that they will not be excused from or an assignment that won't be ac-

cepted the next day once the roads are safe for travel. Employees may be reprimanded by their supervisors.

I get that we're in Maine and I don't expect UMaine to close every time it snows, but it would be nice to see them value our lives as much as our tuition dollars.

**Lance Lajoie**  
Bangor

### Marble for state Senate

People all over Maine who do not live in Senate District 10 are saying, "I wish I could vote for Dennis Marble." I am one of them. That is because over the last 20 years Marble has built a statewide reputation for being persistent, nonpartisan and compassionate. Mainers know him as someone who leads even-handed, civil conversations that address tough challenges. In doing so, he does not alienate those with whom he disagrees. Instead, he welcomes any and all dialogue that will help advance important causes. Greater Bangor has benefited from Marble's practical leadership, and Augusta is in dire need of it.

At a time when gridlock in the State House seems commonplace and rhetoric grows more combative, we must think critically about the legislators we elect. Progress will be hindered if we continue to elect professional politicians who play into partisan agendas. Working Maine families will continue to lose out if we elect those more loyal to wealthy out-of-state corporations. Many of our current legislators fit that mold, including the incumbent for Senate District 10, Andre Cushing.

But Marble, an independent candidate, is the alternative and the ideal. He will relentlessly take on issues that truly matter to his constituents, and just as he has done for the past two decades, bring people together instead of furthering discord. Marble will do so much good for the many fine towns in District 10, but truly for all of Maine as well.

**Autumn Allen**  
Hermon

### LePage at the tea party

Gov. Paul LePage belongs to the Republican tea party agenda, owned fully by the Koch brothers, one of the wealthiest families in the United States. They provide financial support for the tea party and libertarian organizations. When they pull strings on their puppets, such as our governor, they jump and beg for their mercy. Shame on our governor.

**Bill Perreault**  
Brunswick

## OTHER VOICES

### OBAMA'S HEALTH CARE ACT UNFINISHED

Unless Congress finds a way to repeal the Affordable Care Act over the next 10 months — after more than 60 failed attempts — President Barack Obama will leave office with his signature legislation intact, and running pretty smoothly.

His health care plan has reduced the share of Americans without health insurance by half, provided people without job-based coverage access to affordable high-quality options, and prevented people from being denied insurance because of pre-existing health conditions. Meanwhile, health care costs have grown more slowly than they did before the law was passed.

Yet the ACA should by no means be the end of health care reform — not least because it leaves 11.5 percent of adults under 65 uninsured. Greater efforts are needed to make sure everyone who qualifies for government subsidies to buy insurance knows that they do. And the 19 states that still refuse to expand Medicaid to more residents need to get with the program.

Efforts are needed to lower the increasingly crippling costs of co-payments, deductibles and other expenses. In the past decade, the average deductible has more than doubled, to \$1,318.

One good suggestion is Hillary

Clinton's proposal to allow patients three annual visits to a doctor before deductibles kick in. Clinton's refundable tax credit for out-of-pocket costs could help, too.

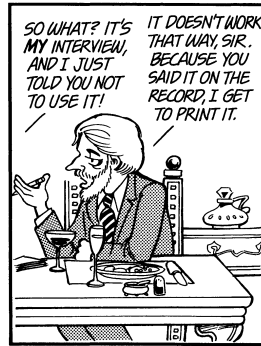
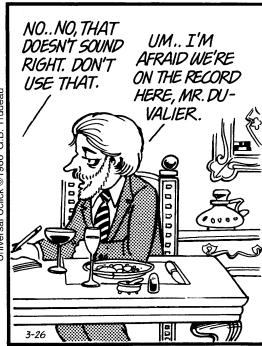
Another fundamental problem with the U.S. health care system is the trajectory of total spending. From 2014 to 2024, it's expected to grow 1.1 percent faster than the economy as a whole.

The Obama administration is trying to counteract this trend by moving away from fee-for-service reimbursement to doctors and hospitals and basing their payments instead on measures of success. This effort will not be finished before Obama leaves office, and it's important that it continue into the next administration.

In years to come, policymakers, voters and the next president will need to expand the goals of health care reform. It's essential, for example, to shrink persistent health disparities by income and geography; to stem rising death rates among middle-aged whites; and to reduce suicide, opioid addiction and infant mortality. Ultimately, the U.S. health care system should go beyond making sure Americans have insurance cards, and see that they live in the best possible health.

*Bloomberg View (March 23)*

### DOONESBURY



### GARRY TRUDEAU