

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

MAINE HAS THE MONEY

IT SHOULD SPEND MORE OF IT ON WELFARE FAMILIES

When the news broke last month that the Maine Department of Health and Human Services had improperly redirected at least \$7.8 million in federal welfare funds meant for children and families to pay for services for elderly and disabled adults, Gov. Paul LePage's administration could have responded professionally: By considering the findings and looking into what went wrong.

But it would have been too optimistic to expect anything resembling reflection and integrity, especially when the topic is public assistance.

Health and Human Services Commissioner Mary Mayhew instead doubled down on defending her department's misdeed, uncovered by the Bangor Daily News.

"This is a comprehensive approach to addressing both our vulnerable young families and to support the needs of our elderly," Mayhew told reporters on June 23 in Biddeford. "I would truly like to understand why the Bangor Daily News is opposed to meeting those objectives."

Mayhew, in her disingenuous attempt to discredit the BDN's findings, also attacked the integrity of those who have had to rely on the state's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program. TANF provides a small amount of monthly assistance to low-income families with children along with supports aimed at helping the adults in those families find and keep jobs. In the past four years, Maine's TANF caseload has fallen more than 60 percent, and the state has built up a \$110 million TANF balance from federal funds it simply hasn't spent.

"There were higher poverty rates for children," Mayhew said, "when all this money was simply going out in the form of a cash benefit to be used in strip clubs, to be used in gambling facilities, to be used to bail someone out of jail."

Mayhew is wrong. It's unclear what timeframe she's referring to in her statement, but Maine's childhood poverty rate is higher than it was a decade ago. In 2014, according to the KIDS COUNT database, 19 percent of Maine children lived in poverty, compared with 16.7 percent in 2005. In the past year alone, Maine's national ranking for overall child well-being slipped to 17th from 12th in the Annie E. Casey Foundation's annual KIDS COUNT data book.

What's especially troubling is Mayhew's characterization of those who depend on TANF. Unfortunately, it's a characterization that has driven changes to Maine law: This spring, lawmakers from both parties agreed to bar TANF recipients from spending their benefits on tobacco, alcohol, lottery tickets, porn magazines and more. They based the change on little more than anecdote.

Instead of coming together to do something constructive for the state's poorest families, the LePage administration has led the state down a path of impugning the neediest.

TANF offers the poorest families in Maine a maximum of \$485 per month for a family of three — an amount that doesn't even reach 30 percent of a poverty-level income, contrary to the impression Mayhew conveys of a lavish welfare benefit.

Meanwhile, there's convincing evidence that it would actually be worthwhile to offer the state's neediest families more money.

Poverty takes a major toll on a child. The research is well accepted showing poverty has a negative effect on a child's physical and mental health, academic achievement and long-term prospects. Growing up in a poor family imposes toxic stress on a developing brain, and society at large ultimately experiences the consequences of childhood poverty: diminished economic contributions, higher crime, increased health care spending and continued poverty.

The simplest way to turn around that situation is money. Years of research have shown that improvements in a household's financial condition can lead to improved IQ scores among children; less stress; and improved, long-term educational attainment. A 2015 paper published by the National Bureau of Economic Research showed that, aside from the health and educational benefits, increases in household income also can cause families to move to higher-income areas where residents have higher education levels.

In other words, low-income parents, by and large, can be trusted to make good decisions for their families with additional resources. Given its \$110 million unspent TANF balance, it's clear what Maine — and the LePage administration — could do to actually help Maine kids overcome poverty.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Cushing for Senate

I was raised by a family that believes in a few things: being a good neighbor, taking care of my patients as an orthodontist and giving back to my community. I am pleased to be represented by someone in the Maine Senate who also shares these values.

Sen. Andre Cushing, R-Newport, is a great example of the type of person who lives these same type of values. My father has known him for years; they both served together on many projects in the Bangor Rotary. My family and I became his neighbors several years ago, and I have watched as he worked on our Town Council and then in the Legislature to support our community and its residents.

It is rare nowadays to find individuals such as Cushing who will listen to us regular folks and then work to make a difference for their issues, regardless of what party they belong to or whether they voted for them.

That's why my family and I will proudly continue to support Cushing. He is a hardworking, thoughtful and respectful representative of Senate District 10, and I am proud to have him serving in the Maine Senate. I ask voters to join me this November and keep him working for all of us.

Anthony Liberatore
Hampden

Speak about racism

Some media groups are blaming the Black Lives Matter movement for the murder of five police officers in Dallas. There is no causation here. Black Lives Matter is a group that's saying because of racism, black

lives haven't mattered. Because they haven't mattered, it's necessary to say that they do matter — Black Lives Matter.

Some object to the very words, Black Lives Matter, crying, "all lives matter." Of course, all lives matter, but the level of police violence against African-Americans with little or no repercussion is a powerful statement that black lives are expendable; it's as if they don't matter. If they mattered, we'd see justice for those who kill blacks.

The murder of the Dallas police was tragic, just as was the killing of Philando Castile and Alton Sterling. Black Lives Matter speaks out against police brutality. The Dallas police were brutally executed, but peaceful Black Lives Matter protesters didn't kill them — a military man with access to guns killed them.

Blame is easy. Rather than blaming, let's see what we can do to foster understanding of ourselves and others. Can we talk to people about Black Lives Matter? Can we recognize the privilege we have as white people who can't know what it's like to be profiled because of

skin color? Supporting Black Lives Matter does not mean that we don't support our police. Let's talk about these issues in our community and in our country.

Linda Garson Smith
Belfast

Addiction recovery

I believe that Gov. Paul LePage is trying to fight the substance abuse treatment all wrong, and so do many others. The Maine Department of Health and Human Services also is doing so by making changes that will hurt people in treatment in the long run.

I attend services at a methadone clinic and others as well. I spend many hours per week on my recovery, and I am a success story and proud of the progress I've struggled to make. To do so, I needed help from the counseling at the methadone clinic I attend and other resources. Anyone in recovery serious enough to recover doesn't only rely on the methadone clinic at which they're a patient, but also therapy and counseling, plus meetings.

People don't realize how much of a struggle it is to recover from an addiction to substances. No one's recovery is cookie-cutter, and everyone has different things to overcome during and after recovery. It took me over a year to be where I'm at, and I'm proud of myself for having success. I hope all others in this battle can take a positive lead in their recovery as I have, and I will do what I can to help others to do so. LePage has no heart for people and needs a new job, not as a political figure.

Amanda Spencer
Levant

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.

.COMMENTS

Editorial, "LePage denies legislator's request for information. Apparently, it's 'excessive disruption'":

That's the "most transparent administration in Maine history" for you.

— 31dot

The obvious question is why the governor feels it so important to deny information concerning the expenditure of taxpayer funds.

— stringah

That is what a representative of the citizens does for his constituents. Gov. Paul LePage and his most transparent government ever has been nothing but one lie after another.

— Eibhlihin

If the Legislature voted to appropriate a specific amount

for a specific reason and this was not acted upon, I'd say they are due an explanation for why it didn't happen the way it was supposed to. No finger pointing here, no blaming, just give us an explanation. That is reasonable.

— KTinME

He puts more time into "gotcha" than into managing effectively. One wonders what he's hiding — just produce the information and stop with the posturing.

— Bill Stuart

He tells the legislator his request is disruptive and excessive, while on the other hand he states that "Of course, like any Maine citizen, you retain the ability to make records requests under the Freedom of Access Act." So why deny it if, under Maine law,

the legislator, who is a citizen, has the right to said information in the first place? Gov. Paul LePage needs to start acting like an elected official and respond accordingly to the wishes of Maine residents — including legislators.

— Gloria Evette

The public has a right to know what business is being conducted under the auspices of government, and how it is being conducted. Requests for information shouldn't have to specifically cite the Freedom of Access Act.

— DIS2012

When are we going to be rid of this pox on Maine called Paul LePage? Can't Attorney General Janet Mills find some legitimate reason to put him in jail?

— letsgetalong2

OTHER VOICES

STICKY WICKETS FOR PRIME MINISTER

Americans must congratulate the British Conservative Party in its quick choice of Theresa May as prime minister in the wake of the vote June 23 to withdraw the United Kingdom from the European Union.

May, 59, on Wednesday replaced David Cameron as prime minister and head of the Conservative Party. He submitted his resignation in the immediate wake of the momentous choice of British voters, by a relatively close 17 million to 16 million, to leave the EU. Cameron had put the referendum on the table in an effort to remain as prime minister last year. In the event, his action proved unnecessary as the Conservatives won a decisive victory in 2015, probably on other issues.

May served as home secretary — in effect, minister of the interior — for six years and as a member of Parliament for 19 years. She studied at Oxford University and has a reputation for being serious and even-tempered, if not charismatic. She became the Conservatives' first choice to replace Cameron when her final rival for the post, Andrea Leadsom, dropped out of the race

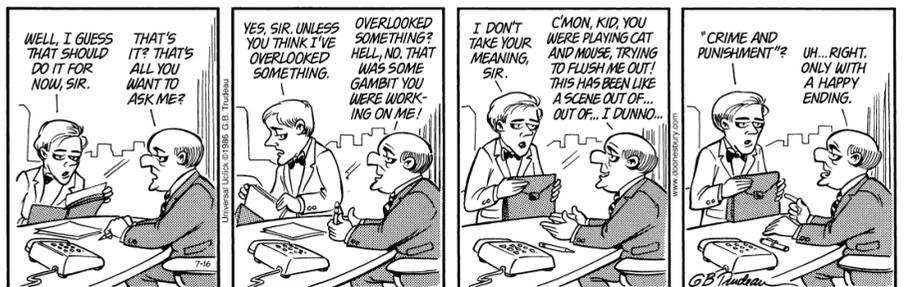
for lack of support. Leadsom had blotted her copybook when she made remarks that suggested she thought that she, as a mother, was better qualified to be prime minister than the childless May.

The new British leader has a brutal task ahead of her as she tries to negotiate the United Kingdom's way out of the EU, retaining the advantages of the relationship while respecting the British electorate's mandate to leave. She herself had opposed leaving but has pledged to carry out the mandate. Last year, 52.2 percent of the U.K.'s imports came from EU countries and the EU bought 43.5 percent of U.K. exports. Sticky business. In addition, two pieces of the United Kingdom, Scotland and Northern Ireland, voted not to leave the EU and are now thinking about succession from the U.K., another problem for May.

The United States, as it tries to cope with its own divisive issues, will find the U.K. under the new prime minister to be a still-interested partner, but one also intensely preoccupied with EU and internal issues.

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (July 13)

DOONESBURY



GARRY TRUDEAU