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GET LOW-INCOME STUDENTS TO COLLEGE

Maine could use some ambition and focus when it comes to making needed investments to turn around an economy that underperforms virtually every other state's. Tennessee and Oregon have translated ambition into action, passing legislation to make community college free to their states' graduating high school seniors. President Barack Obama has made a similar proposal to make community college free nationwide.

Should Maine follow suit?

This fall, about 14,000 Tennessee students who just finished high school are attending community college for free as Tennessee Promise takes effect. (Oregon Promise takes effect next fall.) For those who already receive some financial aid from state and federal sources, Tennessee Promise pays the balance of tuition and fees. For those who receive no financial aid through traditional means, Tennessee Promise pays the full cost out of state funds.

Early indications show the program is catching on. The number of Tennessee high school seniors who enrolled at a community college right after graduation jumped 14 percent this fall.

But the institutions most Tennessee Promise students are entering, community colleges, have struggled with exceptionally low retention and graduation rates. That means the true test of Tennessee Promise is not whether it can enroll more students in post-secondary education but whether it can keep them enrolled and on track to graduate. That's the thinking behind the mentoring and support side of Tennessee Promise, which sets up students with mentors to guide them through the admissions process, then refers those most likely to struggle to support services once they've enrolled.

Maine, which has traditionally made incremental investments in workforce and economic development only to later lose focus, could benefit from the big thinking behind Tennessee's and Oregon's efforts to make some level of post-secondary education the norm for all students. But Maine, which trails the national average in college degree attainment, might consider a different approach to achieving that goal.

To start, the Tennessee and Oregon Promise programs don't target funds to the students who need them most. And the emphasis on associate degrees, which indeed

are the best option for some students, can come at the expense of encouraging students to pursue bachelor's degrees at institutions better equipped to ensure their success.

The Promise initiatives are known as "last dollar" scholarships, so they pay the balance of tuition and fees not covered by other financial aid. But in Maine — and in most other states, Tennessee included — a low-income student who qualifies for the maximum Pell Grant award, \$5,775, would already be able to attend one of Maine's community colleges, where tuition and fees cost about \$3,400 per year for a full-time student, at no cost. But a Promise-like program would cover the full cost for a higher-income student who qualifies for no other financial aid.

It's not higher income students who need the encouragement to enroll in postsecondary classes. In Maine, according to the Mitchell Institute, only 48 percent of economically disadvantaged students from the class of 2014 enrolled in college immediately following high school, compared with 73 percent of nondisadvantaged students. That gap has grown since 2008, Mitchell Institute data show.

What an ambitious Maine intent on cultivating a workforce ready for high-skill jobs could use, then, is an initiative that targets aid to low-income students — ideally, not only help with tuition and fees — and provides them with academic support that helps them stay on track in order to graduate on time, whether from a University of Maine System campus or a community college. An active marketing component would help to let students know higher education is within their reach.

Research on student retention points to the importance of coupling financial assistance with academic support in which students are required to participate. Plus, it helps if the financial assistance is conditioned on students maintaining a minimum GPA and a nearly full-time course load, which increases the likelihood of completion.

The cost, obviously, wouldn't be negligible. But if policymakers have decided Maine can afford to send surplus state funds to an income tax relief account, tap future liquor revenues in order to lower the income tax and forfeit \$16 million in tax credits to bankroll a closed mill, surely they can find a way to make a critical investment in Maine people that will yield dividends.

OTHER VOICES

FRANCIS IN AMERICA

The supermoon was arriving as Pope Francis flew out of Philadelphia Sunday night. It was a spectacular end to an extraordinary visit by the pontiff, who has charmed the world with his simple lifestyle and radical pronouncements.

In six days, the 78-year-old pope visited Philadelphia, New York and Washington, D.C., demonstrating Herculean stamina and contagious goodwill. People traveled from all over the U.S. to wait for the chance to see the "popemobile" pass by. Occasionally, they were rewarded with an impromptu stop, such as when the pope halted the motorcade so he could kiss a 10-year-old with cerebral palsy.

At addresses before Congress and the United Nations, Francis steered carefully through divisive issues such as capital punishment and abortion while urging political leaders to adopt a "spirit of cooperation" while addressing the world's ills. Yet he exhorted bishops and priests to employ "holy

parrhesia" — a fearlessness in speech — when preaching the Gospel. "A Christianity which does little in practice, while explaining its teachings, is dangerously unbalanced," the pope said.

Francis, who famously renounced traditional quarters for a Vatican guestroom, brought his Jesuit minimalism to New York, asking only for water and bananas in his bedroom.

In a visit to the 9/11 memorial in New York City, as well as in a private meeting with five survivors of sexual abuse, a somber pope expressed profound grief.

The central reason for Francis' visit, however, was the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia, where he urged quiet acts of love to strengthen individuals and "the great human family." His last public words on American soil were "God bless America." In affectionate response, America replies, God bless this pope. And please come again.

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (Sept. 29)



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

EITC eligibility

Expanding on a point Eloise Vitelli and Garrett Martin made in their Sept. 7 BDN OpEd, it is imperative that Congress addresses the gaping hole in the Earned Income Tax Credit that makes low-income adults without children, including noncustodial parents, the only workers taxed into — or deeper into — poverty. As a senior in college, this is an important issue for my peers and me as we work to establish ourselves after graduation.

In 2012, federal income and payroll taxes pushed 1.2 million childless workers into poverty and another 5.8 million deeper into poverty. Currently, childless workers under age 25 are ineligible for the tax credit. That makes it harder for those of us just starting out to make ends meet. There is bipartisan support for change, with President Barack Obama and Republican U.S. Rep. Paul Ryan proposing to expand it to include childless workers and lower the eligibility age from 25 to 21.

If Congress fixes this gaping hole, 13.5 million childless workers nationwide, including 64,000 young adults in Maine, would become eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit or receive a larger credit. The credit rewards and encourages work. Expanding the credit would boost employment and reduce poverty among childless workers, contributing to long-term financial security for recipients and a stronger economy overall. As Congress contemplates billions of dollars in tax breaks for businesses, hard-working, low-income young adults cannot be left behind.

Susan Fleurant
Waterville

Thibodeau's task

I saw the Sept. 27 BDN article praising Republican Senate President Mike Thibodeau's newfound status as a bipartisan leader in the State House. The democratic tradition of considered debate and political compromise is the way forward in the angry and divided atmosphere in Augusta.

But let's not be hoodwinked. He and other legislators abandoned any notion of transparency when they brokered a budget deal behind closed doors. The process left Mainers with real interests at stake in the dark and shut the door on accountability. Thibodeau's voting record in the last session hurt Maine families when he voted against increasing the minimum wage and child care legislation.

I hope that in the next session Thibodeau continues to work across the aisle with his Democratic allies and ends his longstanding opposition to family friendly and environmental legislation. Maybe he will even stand up against Gov. Paul LePage and others in his party, who rage against immigrants and opt to advance bipartisan legislation to assist transitioning these immigrants into Maine.

Elizabeth Reid
Belfast

Rich and common folk

This week I watched a small biotech company's stock fall dramatically, then seem to level off. At that point, \$5 million worth of the stock was bought, and the stock suddenly rose 10 percent. Immediately thereafter, and just as suddenly, the stock was sold and its value fell back to

where it was. In my mind I could see brokers smiling broadly as their computer just earned them 10 percent on the money. Winners all.

A little bit later that day, a friend of mine, who was doing some carpentry for a wealthy man told me that the man, who was thought to be a friend, had cheated him out of \$1,000 in pay. The man said he did not promise that when, indeed, he had. My friend goes by someone's word.

Then I hear Donald Trump say he was going to change the tax system to benefit the common folk. After that, I heard support for Trump coming from billionaire Carl Ichan. We have heard Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton say she wants to elevate the common folk; she also is extremely rich.

All I can say is that most people get rich at the expense of others. If we continue to believe the rich have our best interests at heart, we are just fools making the same mistake over and over again.

So why does the name Bernie Sanders keep coming into my mind?

Philip C. Groce
Union

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

OpEd contributor, Reza Jalali, "Maybe Ahmed can build a compass, guide us back to what America stands for":

This young kid was stirring the pot and got what he deserved. The teachers are there to keep kids safe; they did the right thing.
— *SteveyDee*

What is it with rallying around false heroes? The whole Ahmed fiasco looks like a stunt.
— *feingold-in-2016*

The school was not evacuated. Why not? The bomb squad was not called. Why not? If authorities thought it was a bomb, why wasn't it treated as such? The fact is the authorities

knew almost immediately it was nothing more than a clock. So why was the 14-year-old arrested and then suspended from school, if not for the bigotry of the school authorities and police?
— *ademain*

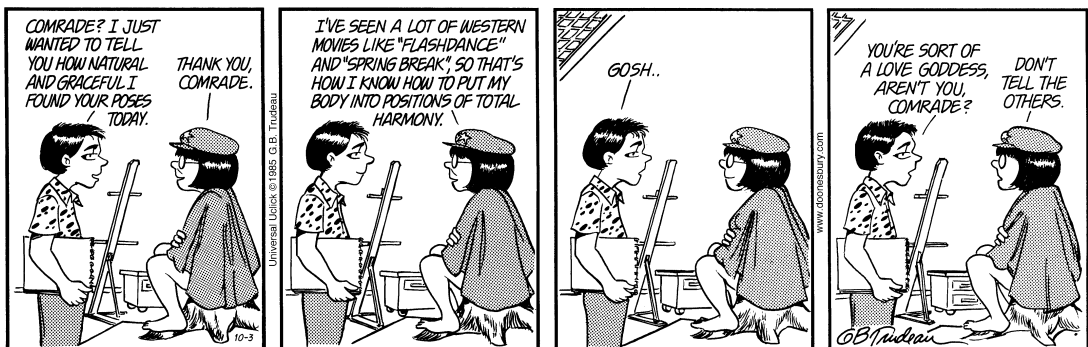
No school wants to see anything that looks like it could be a bomb. School violence happens way too often. I think the same thing would happen in movie theaters, too, no matter the person's race.
— *d lew*

Violence isn't a way of life for most Americans. Many, if not most, Muslims aren't violent, either.
— *Lil Devil*

It didn't look enough like a bomb to produce any "It's a bomb!" reaction. The school wasn't evacuated, the clock wasn't confiscated or blown up by a bomb squad. The clock was kept with the student and adults in the classroom and in the police car that removed him from school. The school called the police instead of asking the science teacher to confirm what the student had said, which would have ended the silly episode immediately.
— *MLChadwick*

Where did all these people who supposedly knew what a "bomb" looks like get their "expertise"? Don't tell me television.
— *bibliofiend*

DOONESBURY



GARRY TRUDEAU