

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'S DRUG PROBLEM

IT NEEDS MORE THAN JUST LAW ENFORCEMENT

A special legislative session dealing with Maine's drug abuse epidemic, as Gov. Paul LePage called for last week, could be a good thing — if the time were used to discuss multiple means of addressing the pervasive problem and finding the money to fund them. If it's just another opportunity for the governor to demand more money for law enforcement, it would be a waste of time.

The governor has long favored increasing the ranks of law enforcement, and using the National Guard, with the aim of reducing the supply of illegal drugs, particularly heroin, over increasing support for treatment. In June, LePage vetoed the Legislature's two-year budget, saying it was soft on drug traffickers. The budget that passed over his objections cut his initial request of seven more Maine Drug Enforcement Agency agents and four judges to four agents and two prosecutors. It also included funding for two judges and two clerks to handle more drug cases. It also allows the MDEA to use \$200,000 in federal money at its discretion to hire more staff or begin new programs. LePage did not ask for funding for 14 new drug enforcement agents, as he now claims.

Since the budget's passage, LePage has repeatedly denigrated lawmakers for not giving him more drug enforcement agents.

He made an unexpected appearance before the Legislature's Appropriations Committee last Thursday, saying he planned to contact legislative leaders to encourage them to approve more spending for law enforcement to combat drug use. In his usual way, however, he gave them an ultimatum: "You either work with me and give me some agents, or I will call the Guard up," he told the committee. He reiterated that threat in a letter to legislative leaders on Tuesday.

LePage also told committee members that Maine should have 10 more drug agents — not the seven he initially requested — plus more prosecutors and judges, for which he pegged the likely cost at \$5 million-\$6 million.

Will it work? Given the country's long war on drugs and the fact that drug addiction remains a crushing problem, the evidence suggests it won't. The U.S. al-

ready has the highest incarceration rate in the world. Yet heroin addiction is on the rise around the country. In Maine, 105 people died of drug overdoses in the first six months of this year; of those, 37 were attributable to heroin.

Even New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, a close political ally of LePage, touts the need for treatment, not just arrests.

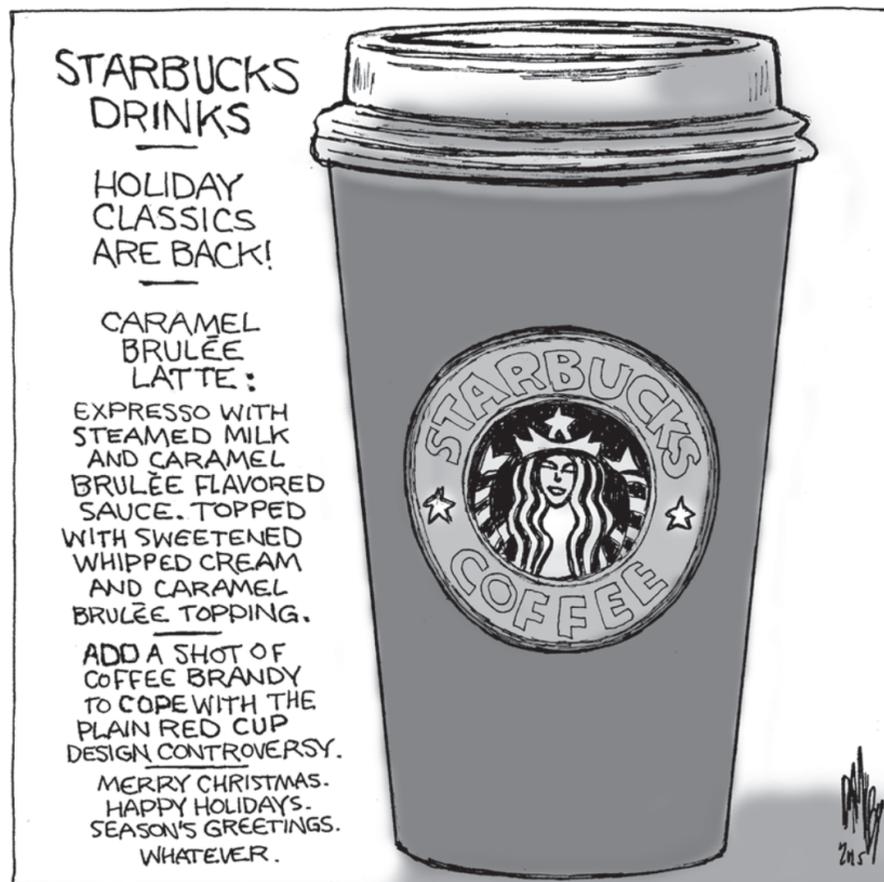
At a recent town hall meeting in New Hampshire, Christie spoke passionately about a law school classmate who injured his back and became addicted to painkillers. After 10 years of seeking treatment, his friend was found dead in a motel room with a bottle of pills and a bottle of vodka. "He's a drug addict and he couldn't get help and he's dead," Christie said of his 52-year-old friend, who "had everything" — a great education, a successful law career, a beautiful wife and daughters, big house, fancy car, plenty of money. "It can happen to anyone."

"We need to start treating people in this country, not jailing them," Christie said. "We need to give them the tools they need to recover because every life is precious."

Portugal turned this idea into action by decriminalizing drug use in 2001. Deaths due to opiates dropped significantly and drug use in Portugal was lower than in other European countries, a 2009 report by the Cato Institute found. Without fear of prosecution, drug addicts in Portugal are more likely to seek treatment and the money that was spent prosecuting and imprisoning drug addicts is now available for treatment programs.

In Maine, two addiction treatment centers closed earlier this year. At the start of last year, hundreds of people in treatment for addictions lost their Maine-Care coverage, essentially eliminating their access to treatment. Providers share numerous stories of addicts seeking treatment being turned away because there is not space in their programs.

Maine's leaders have much to talk about regarding the state's drug epidemic and how best to address it. The governor and his staff could play a productive role in that discussion, if only their solutions went beyond increased law enforcement.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Eves a poor choice

For the last six months, I have observed from a distance the controversy around Gov. Paul LePage's decision to withhold funds intended for Good Will-Hinckley's charter school that serves at-risk children. If Maine's Speaker of the House Mark Eves has a history of anti-charter school bias, shouldn't that be a valid reason to object to Eves' appointment as head of the school? I am a graduate and former board member of Good Will-Hinckley and a strong advocate of school choice.

The board of directors should have selected someone totally familiar with the history and mission of Good Will-Hinckley. In 1984, I chaired the search committee that chose Dr. James Hennigar to be the executive director, leading to the eventual revival of the school. Hennigar had read every book written by the founder and clearly understood the challenges ahead of him. I connected him with a friend who served on the board of the Harold Alford Foundation. That relationship lasted many years and contributed greatly to the renewal of a struggling school during his tenure.

I admit that the relationship between the governor and the speaker is rocky at best. When the media and LePage haters take a moment and go back to the reason why Eves' appointment may have been a mistake, perhaps civility may return to Maine politics.

Dan Hillard
Wilder, Vermont

Paper industry is gone

Great Northern Paper was sold to a multinational company. It was downhill from there. A few years later, the workers were in the midst of their first

labor strike in their mills. The woods workers union had already been defeated. This is more than 40 years of multinationals ruining the economy around Katahdin.

Yet, the few that have survived economically still want to act as if the forest industry is going to continue to support the towns around Katahdin. The paper industry is gone.

Does anybody remember what the economy of this area was like before the paper industry? Do we really have to go that far back before we allow change? Residents of the region really should ask themselves how is this working for them? That is the question Dr. Phil asks when he wants people to realize what is going on around them.

Charlie Cirame
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.

Tailgating morons

I agree wholeheartedly with Emmet Meara's Nov. 9 Bangor Daily News column about the number of tailgating morons on the road these days. I'll also add the morons who pass and pull back in a car length or two ahead of you, even though there are no other cars in the lane. Unfortunately, these morons

probably don't read letters to the editor.

Jo Ann Higgins
Bangor

Eves support

I want to thank legislators Joan Welsh, Peggy Rotundo, Chuck Kruger and Drew Gattine for their Nov. 10 BDN OpEd in support of House Speaker Mark Eves. I very much support the way Eves has dealt with Gov. Paul LePage. Anyone who has been a parent knows that arguing with a 3-year-old who is having a tantrum will get nowhere.

I am not surprised that Rep. John Martin criticized Eves in a Nov. 7 BDN article for not telling LePage one on one "exactly what he thought of him." Martin is the sole reason I voted for term limits. I am looking forward to the day our state government moves forward on important issues in a civil way, as modeled by Eves.

Beth Dilley
Southwest Harbor

A veteran to honor

My younger brother George, who lives in Old Town, served in the U.S. Army during the Korean War. When he was 4 years old, he lost two fingers of his left hand and then lost the sight in one of his eyes at about the same age. We lived on a farm in Hersey at the time. There were eight of us children.

He went on to own a business called George Bates and Sons in Lewiston that sold and rented TVs. After, he went to Shin Pond, near Patten, and became a bush pilot until he was badly burned in a crash.

Now there is a veteran to be honored.

Hollis Bates
Lewiston

OTHER VOICES

BUSH IS RIGHT ON BIG BANKS

During Tuesday's presidential debate, Jeb Bush offered one of the clearest policy proposals yet to emerge from the Republican field: Increase capital requirements to reduce the threat that big banks can present to the economy.

Capital is often misunderstood, portrayed as some kind of rainy-day fund that banks must set aside, or as a sort of punishment for previous misbehavior. Actually, it's equity that banks get from shareholders — money they can use to make loans and other investments. The more capital banks have, the more capable they are of taking the kinds of risks that make the economy dynamic.

Several of the largest U.S. financial institutions have less than \$5 in equity for every \$100 in assets, measured according to international accounting standards. That means a net loss of 5 percent would be enough to render them insolvent.

In good times, using more debt, or leverage, boosts banks' performance — measured as the return on equity. In bad times, shareholders risk only the meager

amount of equity they've put in. Beyond that, the banks' losses become everyone's problem, as the distress reverberates through the broader economy and necessitates taxpayer bailouts.

Raising equity requirements would have benefits far beyond making the system safer. By increasing shareholders' responsibility for risk, it could create an incentive for them to divide the banks into more manageable — and potentially more valuable — pieces. That, in turn, could render unnecessary much of the regulatory complexity that Republicans rail against.

More equity also could allow regulators to simplify rules that burden smaller banks, another important issue that Bush raised in the debate. Well-capitalized institutions that don't get involved in trading and derivatives shouldn't have to file lengthy reports sorting their assets into myriad risk categories or submit to examinations as frequently as others.

All told, the benefits of boosting banks' capital so outweigh the costs, the only question is: Why wait for the next president to do it?

Bloomberg View (Nov. 12)

.COMMENTS

Editorial, "Why a national park makes sense for Maine's North Woods":

Keep Maine land under Maine control. Why not add this land to Baxter State Park? But I guess that wouldn't fit under RESTORE: Maine's original agenda.
— grumpygrumpy

Yes to a national park.
— jrsb97

The BDN Editorial Board and all supporters of this idea really should get out more and see more of the U.S. and the real national parks. In reality, the North Woods is little more than a nice big wood lot. If it becomes a national park, it will be a huge waste of tax dollars while also becoming the laughing stock of

our national park system.
— MovingForwardMaine

The feds aren't "grabbing" anything. The landowner is having a hard time giving it away.
— Dirty Lew

My kids had to leave Maine because there's more money out of state. A national park will not change that no matter what the park people think.
— bear run

No national park.
— Wendy Pennell

National parks draw tourists, the studies show. President Teddy Roosevelt created them for a reason. I don't see why people want to trust private corporations that seek profit over beauty to protect the beauty of the area.

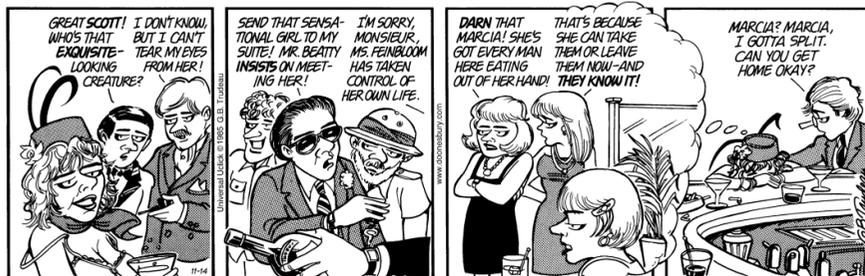
They won't. History shows that. As for manufacturing jobs, those are being automated more and more. Even trucks and cars will be driven by robots.
— Spruce Dweller

Sixty-seven percent of Mainers living in the 2nd Congressional District support a national park. So do I.
— EABeem

Why is this even being debated? The people have spoken. No park, so get over it.
— Fatuous Libby

Why can't Roxanne Quimby leave this land to the state of Maine and let the Baxter State Park Authority manage it? What's driving her to the federal government to manage it?
— Mutt Glidden Cornersfield, ME

DOONESBURY



GARRY TRUDEAU