

# Maine can learn from Lowell about immigration

BY LINDA SILKA  
SPECIAL TO THE BDN

**B**DN Maine’s #TheEconomyProject asks us to think about how we can grow Maine’s economy in the face of Maine’s shrinking workforce. When Maine’s future is brought up, many worry about Maine’s declining birth rates, out-migration and lack of in-migration. How, people are asking, are we going to encourage more people to come to Maine?

Some of Maine’s leaders suggest we consider what the state’s economy would gain if we were to invite others such as immigrants to make their homes here. James Tierney, former attorney general in Maine, as well as many other leaders, argue that steps of this sort could bolster our sagging economy.

Consider a few facts. Immigrants started 20 percent of all new U.S. businesses in 2011 and contributed more than \$775 billion to the U.S. gross domestic product, according to the Partnership for a New American Economy report “Open for Business: How Immigrants are Driving Small Business Creation in the United States.” Immigrant-owned businesses now employ one out of every 10 American workers in privately owned companies.

And immigrant numbers are growing. Some places are leading the way in growth in their immigrant populations. These include some expected states (California and New York, for example) and some unexpected ones (Iowa and North Dakota).

A recent Pew Research Report indicates that, from 1960 to 2005, immigrants and their descendants accounted for 51 percent of the increase in U.S. population, and from 2005 to 2050 immigrants are projected to contribute 82 percent of the total increase of U.S. population.

What can we learn from our neighbors who have been successful in jumpstarting their economies by becoming welcoming places?

One place we can look is Lowell, Massachusetts. Lowell has confronted many of the struggles faced by other parts of New England: a declining economy and population loss. This has changed in recent years as the city has become diverse in its immigrant population. Businesses developed by new immigrants



CAROL M. HIGSMITH | LIBRARY OF CONGRESS  
The Boott Cotton Mills complex in Lowell, Massachusetts, contains mills built from the mid-1830s to the early 20th century. Today, the restored complex houses the Boott Cotton Mills Museum, a part of Lowell National Historical Park.

are burgeoning. For example, 350 Asian-owned businesses have been started, creating thousands of jobs to people of all races and backgrounds.

Lowell is one of only seven communities in the U.S. — and only one in the Northeast — selected to be featured in the report by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, “Helping Immigrants Become New Americans.”

The jobs being created are relevant to Maine. Take farming, for example. Farming is so much a part of our history, but, as sources such the Historical Atlas of Maine show, it is also a part of our history of loss. There have been periods in Maine’s past when farms and farm families dwindled.

In Maine we often view farming with nostalgia but also with worry about whether it has a future. The loss of farms is related to the past loss of population, but, surprisingly, it’s also linked to recent gains of young people coming to Maine to seek out organic farming opportunities. They work to make a living under challenging conditions where much land is available. For immigrants coming from

rural backgrounds, which is the case for many immigrants, Maine presents intriguing opportunities. In Massachusetts, groups have started programs with titles such as “New Farmers New Beginnings” that build on the fact that many immigrants were farmers in their home countries and, with assistance, can learn to adapt their expertise to the climate conditions and economic circumstances of the Northeast.

Near Lowell, the owners of a multigenerational farm made part of their land available to immigrant farmers to re-establish their skills and grow traditional vegetables that would help to meet the food consumption needs of their immigrant community. Some of these farmers were elders in their community who had the goal not only to farm but to demonstrate to younger generations the potential of farming as a way to continue traditions.

And it is not just farming. Maine is far from being recognized only for its traditions in farming. There are other opportunities to tap into the skills that immigrants bring. Consider fishing.

Maine’s traditional fishing livelihoods are now endangered because of a decline in fish stocks. Mainers are turning to emerging approaches, such as aquaculture, to fill the livelihood gaps created by those declines. Some immigrants bring to the U.S. experience with aquaculture; as was the case in Lowell, aquaculture is familiar to many immigrants from Southeast Asia.

Some also are acutely aware of the devastation that results from the overuse of and pollution of a resource. The large freshwater “sea” Tonle Sap in Cambodia, now largely depleted of fish, once was a primary fish source for Southeast Asians. It was immigrants coming to Lowell who carried much of the deep knowledge of what happened to this resource.

All of this is very much about how we learn from each other to create a vibrant economic future. And it is also about how we do so without losing the past. Maine is sometimes negatively described as a state with an illustrious past but not much of a future. It is sometimes seen as emptying out — as losing its population, its strategies for growth and its way forward. Lowell was likewise de-

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scribed in this discouraging way: as having an eminent past as a birthplace of America’s industrial revolution but as having become an emptying, dying place.

Maine has the potential to be a leader in devising effective, innovative approaches to our economic challenges. Maine can not only learn from others’ experiences but can set the groundwork for resilient approaches. Such approaches would be rooted in Maine experiences, ethos and resources and would consider what it would look like to develop strategies that take into account such factors as our weather, our economy and our dispersion of population.

How will Mainers respond to all of this? In work on a different topic, University of Maine researchers have found that when Mainers see something as a part of Maine’s traditions, they welcome what otherwise may be seen as a scary new prospect.

Maine has a long tradition of welcoming newcomers. In the past newcomers came from French Canada and other parts of the world that may be different from where people are coming from now, but immigration remains an important part of our tradition and part of what has made Maine what it is today.

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## Drones

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But some legal analysts suggest that because drones often operate in non-navigable airspace — airspace below 1,000 feet, the minimum safe altitude for manned flight — the FAA’s authority over navigable airspace may not allow it to preempt state and local drone regulations within non-navigable airspace.

### Not in my airspace

State and local governments began passing laws and ordinances to restrict drones in 2013, filling what they saw as a regulatory void left in the absence of federal regulations.

Not only that, when state or city residents encounter a reckless drone operator or have other drone-related concerns, they are more likely to go to their local city council, state representative or police department, not the FAA, to demand action.

Local governments are left wondering “what they should do and what can they do” about drones, said Eric Conrad, spokesman for the Maine Municipal Association, which has received a number of calls in the last year calls from members with questions about the use of drones and how local governments can respond to nuisance drones. Among the top concerns is keeping drones from observing people and taking pictures in violation of their privacy.

No Maine city has yet passed an ordinance restricting where, when and how people fly drones, although several elsewhere in the U.S. have erected barriers, legally speaking, to fend off errant drones.

St. Bonifacius, Minnesota, passed the first municipal ordinance banning drones within the city limits out of concern that the aircraft would be used to violate residents’ privacy. Its ordinance banned drone flights in the airspace within 400 feet



GARY CAMERON | REUTERS FILE  
People take photos of an Intel AscTec Firefly drone during a flight demonstration at the House Commerce, Manufacturing and Trade subcommittee on Capitol Hill in Washington in November 2015.

above the city, with exceptions made for law enforcement and residents flying drones over their property.

Other cities, including Pittsburgh and Chicago, have acted to ban drone flights over schools and playgrounds, near airports and elsewhere within the city limits, so long as the drones are flying no higher than 400 feet. The area above 400 feet is considered the exclusive regulatory territory of the federal government.

According to the National Council of State Legislatures, 45 states considered 168 drone use-related bills in 2015. To date, 26 states have related laws on the books.

The Maine Legislature considered two bills in 2015 that would restrict the use of drones. One bill that requires police to obtain a search warrant before using a drone as part of a criminal investigation became law in October. A second bill that would have barred drones from flying over private property without permission died in committee.

Legislators worried that, by passing the bill, they would be overstepping the state’s authority by regulating the airspace. They also worried that the bill could open the state up to a challenge by federal regulators.

No local drone regulations so far have been struck down on the grounds of federal preemption, and the fate of existing regulations (and even future regulations) is uncertain.

Attempts to reach FAA legal representatives to learn what action could be taken against these regulations were unsuccessful.

### Evolving area of law

Cities and states with local drone regulations may not receive answers about the fate of their rules until the FAA releases its omnibus drone regulations sometime in 2016, well after its initial September 2015 deadline.

Without a federal regulatory framework, it’s impossible to pinpoint when and where state and local regulations will conflict with those of the federal government.

Bosse said there could be “a sliding scale” to determine what restrictions cities and states can impose on drone use. The FAA in its memo appears to leave room to maneuver, recommending that states and cities consult with the FAA about restrictions on drone flights before putting them into force. States and cities can, without consulting the FAA, require police to obtain search warrants before using drones and prohibit drones from being used for hunting and fishing.

Drones are pushing the FAA into new territory that doesn’t have tidy precedents, legal analysts say. The FAA has even acknowledged that it may not have the resources to enforce regulations on this ubiquitous technology and that state and local police will be in the best position to stop reckless drone use. So a degree of flexibility in allowing state and local governments to manage drones in the non-navigable airspace could be to the agency’s benefit.



ALY SONG | REUTERS FILE  
Actor Arnold Schwarzenegger attends a promotional tour for the film “Terminator Genisys” in Shanghai, China, in August 2015.

## Steed

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being — it is who, what, and why we are. We can adapt, or we can die by inviting upon ourselves what comes with the refusal to adapt.

At my company, we are perpetually adapting our offerings, services and expertise to accommodate a market that changes as much in a year as it once did in a decade. Adaptation is mandatory, and the circumstances that require it are more unpredictable, demanding and frequent than they have ever been before.

In 2016, in a way that is more intentional than ser-

endipitous, I look forward to concentrating on how we are adapting, how we will survive (or, perhaps, won’t) when confronted with revolutions and renaissance, large and small, as they present themselves.

How will we reconcile life as it changes before our eyes? How will we adapt to a future that presents itself in present tense? How will we survive?

Stay tuned.

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## Politics

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16. And last, but certainly not least, on Feb. 7, sometimes-Maine resident Roger Goodell will hand the Super Bowl MVP trophy to Tom Brady. I don’t care who you are, that will be fun to watch. (OK, that last prediction may not be political.)

Some of these things I hope come to pass. Others I hope will not. But we all deal with reality as it is,

not as we wish it to be. And the reality is we have real challenges facing our state and nation, and we need men and women in leadership who are willing to confront them head-on.

So, ladies and gentlemen, Happy New Year! Let’s get to work.

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