

Commentary

Editorials

Prepare and pull together

This is a scary time for many in our community. People are afraid. They are afraid of the coronavirus and what it could mean for their families, friends, colleagues and neighbors. They also are afraid of the collateral damage. Local schools have shut down, leaving parents who must work scrambling for childcare. Small local businesses, especially restaurants, are hurting. Older and immune-compromised Mainers are feeling isolated and at risk.

Fear can be a great motivator, but sometimes it leads us to do irrational things. Emptying the store shelves of toilet paper, diapers, baby formula and other necessities in order to amass huge stockpiles for personal use defies logic and standards of basic decency. There's a real difference between being prepared and panicking.

Panic can be as dangerous as any virus and spread even faster. Coronavirus is a legitimate threat and how we rise to meet that threat will test the efficacy of our nation's infectious disease prevention measures and the capacity of our health care system. It also will test citizens' willingness to comply with recommended precautions against the disease.

Public officials at all levels must be proactive and transparent about their efforts to contain and combat the spread, basing their decisions on the best available science. Citizens must do their part to wash their hands and stay home when they're sick. It's always a good idea, and particu-

larly pertinent now, to have a couple of weeks' worth of essentials in the pantry and medicine cabinet just in case. But unnecessary hoarding is not fair to the next shopper. Many people can't afford to buy large quantities at a time. When they do head to the store for necessities, they need to find them.

The coronavirus — and fear of it — has already had serious financial implications with more to come. Many upcoming events in Hancock County and around Maine have been called off or postponed. Bicentennial plans for this past Sunday, the state's official 200th anniversary, were nixed. The Great Harbor Shoot Out, which had games scheduled on Mount Desert Island as well as in Ellsworth and Trenton over the weekend, was cancelled late last week. So too were the teams' hotel reservations and dinner plans. This at a time of year when local establishments could use a cash infusion. Event organizers are prudent to heed the advice of public health officials and postpone large indoor gatherings, but it comes at a cost.

So while it may not be the right time to gather together, it is the right time to pull together. To find ways to support affected businesses and nonprofits. To check in with friends and neighbors who might be at particular risk. To leave a little toilet paper on the shelf for the next guy.

We have an obligation to look out for each other — not just ourselves. And to remember, this too shall pass.

Sunshine week

Maine's Freedom of Access Act, which became law in 1975, cites that "public proceedings exist to aid in the conduct of the people's business." Each week the pages of the Mount Desert Islander (Ellsworth American) are filled with stories that stem from public proceedings. This paper, and its reporters, know that the public relies on us for complete, factual, and comprehensive news coverage and to deliver that we rely, in part, on two-way communications with elected and governmental officials. Sometimes those relationships work well, with news and information flowing readily from a municipality to the public, and sometimes additional tools are needed.

One such tool is Maine's FOAA law, which grants to all people the right to inspect records and attend public proceedings. It aims to ensure transparency and accountability and works to

shine a light at all levels of government. This year, March 15-21 has been deemed Sunshine Week and with it comes a chance to highlight Maine's right to know laws, including the Freedom of Access Act.

Maine's FOAA laws are for everyone — not just journalists. All governmental proceedings, with narrow exceptions, are open to the public and the public has the right to be included in most steps of the decision being made around them.

Any member of the public has the right to request documents from their local, state, and federal government and to review the meeting minutes taken at each public meeting. We urge the public to exercise these rights whenever possible because those actions reinforce the importance of the law and remind elected officials that a democratic system relies on an open flow of information.

Everything looks better in sunshine — especially the government.

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Letters

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR POLICY

The Mount Desert Islander welcomes letters to the editor.

Letters of no more than 350 words, and 500 words for Viewpoint submissions, are encouraged. All letters must include the writer's name, town of residence and a telephone number, for confirmation purposes only. Opinion pieces may be edited for slander, libel, clarity or length. Anonymous letters, letters that serve exclusively as a thank-you, and those endorsing commercial products or establishments will not be accepted. The Islander will not publish election letters in the edition immediately prior to that election. Letters should be sent to news@mdislander.com and must be received by Monday at 9 a.m. to be considered for the week's issue.

time, which could last weeks or months.

However, I was disheartened to hear the Committee Chair say "We cannot cancel cruise ship season. That is not responsible." While the federal government and private entities across the country and state (including cruise ship companies) are canceling events, closing schools and instituting telework, the committee discussed how the cruise ship industry was taking measures to prevent the spread of coronavirus in our community when they land on our shore. They spoke of multiple screening of passengers, onboard testing and even onboard virus-detector machines. They spoke of taking temperatures and evaluating anyone with a temp of 100.4 (what would they do with a passenger with a temperature of 100?). All of this will not mitigate our risk or the impact on our limited resources, but temporarily banning cruise ships will.

The Coast Guard official reassured the group that they were not counting on sending the sick to MDI Hospital, but when pressed, did admit that a critical patient could be taken to our tiny local hospital.

The chair of the committee and the cruise ship representative suggested that 5,000 people on a cruise ship in a confined space being released into our community was no different and heck maybe even safer than the many tourists arriving by car as the cruise ship patients (whoops I mean passengers) are screened more frequently.

One only has to look at CDC recommendations regarding cruises to understand the danger of confining large numbers of people in one space. CDC recommends travelers, particularly those with underlying health issues, defer all cruise ship travel worldwide. Cruise ship passengers are at increased risk of person-to-person spread of infectious diseases, including COVID-19.

I urge the Cruise Ship Com-

mittee to recommend canceling spring cruise ship arrivals now. That is the responsible thing to do.

Jacqueline Levesque
Bar Harbor

Social distancing or personal spacing?

To the Editor:

It's like a hurricane or Nor'easter but you can't see it or forecast it! The good news? No power outages or property damage. However, there will be consequences. We all need to follow the Centers for Disease Control recommendations to get through this.

I don't really like the term "social distancing." Although I totally agree with the concept, I don't believe we should "socially" wall ourselves off from the world. "What?," you say! "Yes!," I say! In these uncertain times we should stay "socially" connected. Stay informed about the current situation via television or internet. Choose responsible sources, like CDC.gov. But, equally important, we should stay "socially" connected with those we can't connect with physically. FaceTime, Facebook, Instagram, texting or just plain old-fashioned phone calls are so important right now, especially when the most vulnerable among us need it the most.

I'm trying to think of innovative ways to do that. My therapy dog, Miss Scarlett, and I will miss our weekly visits with Birch Bay residents. But there is no reason why we can't see them and talk to them. We could see them through their window and talk to them on the phone. Weather has been conducive to that. Go outside,

State of Maine

Freshman legislators seeking re-election as primary season approaches

By Jill Goldthwait

What's the lineup for Hancock County in the upcoming primaries? We had a large freshman class elected in the 2018 election. Reps. Dick Campbell (R-Orrington), Brian Hubbell (D-Bar Harbor) and Larry Lockman (R-Bradley) are termed out this year, but five other local legislators are freshmen and all five are seeking re-election.

Three are Democrats, two Republican. The Dems are Reps. Genevieve McDonald (Stonington), Sarah Peabworth (Blue Hill) and Nicole Grohoski (Ellsworth). Republicans are Billy Bob Faulkingham (Winter Harbor) and Sherm Hutchins (Penobscot).

McDonald has a primary opponent in Julie Eaton, a lobsterman and firebrand on behalf of the fishery, but McDonald is a lobsterman herself and has the advantage of a term's experience in the Legislature, where she served on the Marine Resources Committee. She has been an informed and conscientious legislator.

The other lobsterman in the delegation, Billy Bob Faulkingham, has a general election opponent in Democrat Antonio Blasi. Faulkingham's performance in his first term leaves him well positioned for a second, and he is likely more in tune with his Downeast district than Blasi. Sherm Hutchins and Nicole Grohoski have general election opponents and are in equally good posi-



Jill Goldthwait

office from 2010-2018, a moderate Republican and a fixture in Ellsworth who suited enough Democrats to keep a hold on his seat in this left-leaning county. A decades-long teacher in career and technical education programs in Ellsworth, he is the recently named head of a program he helped start.

The "bridge" program has become the Bridge Academy. It gives Maine high school students an opportunity to begin college courses prior to their high school graduation at about one third the cost per credit. Those students could get a college degree in three years, lowering the overall cost of a degree.

Langley owns a restaurant in Ellsworth and is familiar with the trials and tribulations of small business. It will be an interesting contest. Both Langley and Luchini have records to run on. Check them out.

The blockbuster race? Senate District 8, the seat currently held by Sen. Kimberley Rosen. She served four terms in the House and is now looking to a third term in the Senate. Not unlike Brian Langley, Rosen functions at a low level of partisanship, saying she doesn't like to be "pinned to one side or the other." She is highly responsive to constituents.

Her challenge is similar to Langley's. Are they Republican enough for Republicans? And though they might be Republican moderates, they are not Demo-

crats. They are the bedrock of the Maine Legislature. Do we have enough middle-of-the-road voters left to support them?

Rosen has a primary challenger who presents a sharp distinction. Larry Lockman, one of the most conservative members of the House, has earned a reputation for inflammatory rhetoric. Rosen's Republican Senate colleagues have endorsed her; Lockman comes with the support of former Governor Paul LePage.

There is a primary on the Democratic side of that district too. Bev Uhlenhake, a former mayor of Brewer who made a decent showing against Rosen in 2018, will try again to unseat her this fall. It is likely an uphill battle. Opposing Uhlenhake in that Democratic primary is Trudy Scee, also of Brewer, who if nothing else has the prettiest logo in this crowded race.

Seven people for two seats — too bad this is the exception and not the norm. It is good to have choices. That inspires the voter to do some due diligence rather than just show up and vote for the only candidate.

Unenrolled candidates have until June 1 to file, so we won't know if the Hancock County rosters are complete until then. Another caveat: The deadline for party candidates was Monday, March 16, at 5 p.m., so it is possible other candidates might have filed after this column's Sunday deadline.

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