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GUEST COLUMN

Maine's Constitution holds reason for people to hope

With the elections a few weeks behind us, it is time for Maine workers to regroup and remember what they stand for. While Gov. Paul LePage is in office for another four years and likely not interested in ensuring that Maine workers are protected, people cannot simply turn a cheek and hope for the best.

We need to continue our efforts to protect the working class of Maine. It may seem like a fool's errand, but we can hold on to some hope that there are ways to stop the more egregious policies and laws that will likely come forth in the next four years.

That hope lies in the checks and balances system built into the Constitution. There are three branches of government: executive, legislative and judicial, to make sure not one area steps out of line.

Take, for example, the recent work of the judicial branch when a federal appeals court determined Gov. LePage's proposal to cut 19- and 20-year-olds from MaineCare was illegal.

When LePage originally proposed those cuts, the federal government rejected them. Maine's own top attorney, Attorney General Janet Mills, determined and advised Gov. LePage that they were unlawful. Because the cuts were deemed unconstitutional, her office declined to represent the state on this matter.

Unfortunately, Gov. LePage continued on, earmarking \$100,000 of taxpayers' money to hire a separate attorney to fight the battle for those cuts. He has had the state of Maine sue for the cuts and has now been rejected by the courts twice. Despite the fact that nobody on either side of the aisle believes these cuts pass legal muster, it looks like that fight won't end any time soon.

Not exactly the best use of Maine's resources.

Karen Bilodeau
Guest Columnist



At least the checks and balances provided by the three branches of government ensure that even if you are elected governor of this state, you are not allowed to circumvent the law.

Of course, when dealing with the judicial branch, it is helpful if the executive branch has somebody with a great depth of knowledge and experience to help with determining whether

Mainers may have a long four years ahead, but now is not the time to give up. We must believe in the power of the three branches of government and fight to ensure the legality of the laws and policies introduced in the next few years.

laws and policies are legal before going through the cost and time involved in dealing with them in court. The attorney general is that expert.

Which, of course, leaves me wondering what will happen if Gov. LePage's vision of reducing the role of the attorney general comes true. Upon his reelection, he said one of his priorities is to introduce legislation that eliminates the requirement that the attorney general has to make sure laws created by the state's departments are, in fact, legal.

The role of the attorney general is to be the top law enforcer and provide legal advice to the government. Part of that advice would be on the legality of laws

and proposals the state would like to pass. By bypassing the attorney general's advice, the state of Maine risks running into time-consuming, pointless lawsuits, costly fines and even more costly mistakes.

I thought LePage's agenda was to save money.

Take, for example, the potential loss of 50 percent of the administrative funding for the food stamps program that Maine could face for instituting a new policy requiring photos to be on the electronic benefit transfer cards. That new policy, introduced without any sense of discussion or debate by the Department of Health and Human Services, may actually represent a violation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Had the DHHS presented

this policy to the attorney general, she could have advised the department on its legality. Instead, Maine is facing a potential cut in funding for that important program.

Mainers may have a long four years ahead, but now is not the time to give up. We must believe in the power of the three branches of government and fight to ensure the legality of the laws and policies introduced in the next few years.

Maine's working class depends on it.

Karen Bilodeau is an attorney and partner at the workers' rights law firm of McTeague Higbee. She is a resident of Auburn.

SYNDICATED COLUMNIST



Cal Thomas

Try taking an 'attitude of gratitude'

If Thomas Jefferson could be faulted for one thing in composing the Declaration of Independence, it might be his inclusion of the words "the pursuit of happiness" in the text.

Happiness is a vapor that cannot be grasped; a temporary feeling based on transitory circumstances akin to the euphoria of a full-on sugar rush. Happiness is good for a time, but it cannot last. Life invariably intervenes.

So many seem so unthankful about so much these days. Turn on the TV or read a newspaper and you will find complainers. Democrats complain about Republicans and the reverse. The poor complain about the rich and the rich complain that they are being taxed too much. Citizens complain about illegal immigrants. Whites complain about people of color and people of color complain right back.

Recently, in Ferguson, Missouri, we saw lots of people complaining about the police and alleged injustice while storeowners whose businesses were destroyed legitimately complained about the rioters.

There's an old Southern gospel song

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whose title other writers have used with different lyrics, but the one I like best is the one that encourages people to "have an attitude of gratitude."

At Thanksgiving time, those of us who believe in God thank him for his many blessings. These include food to eat, clothes to wear, a roof over our heads, good health for those fortunate enough to have it and good doctors for those who don't, a job for those who have one and the chance to find employment for those who don't (and unemployment insurance to bridge the gap between jobs).

We aren't grateful enough for what we have. Instead of complaining about what we don't have, try thanking someone for what you do have. Thank a soldier for your freedom, even the freedom to complain about your political leaders without fear of being arrested, as is the case in many countries. Find something good to say about another person and thank them for it. Thank your parents, if they are living, no matter how bad your upbringing may have been. They gave you the gift of life, what you make of it is up to you.

Oprah Winfrey sometimes comes up with something worth quoting. I found this gem through a Google search: "Be thankful for what you have; you'll end up having more. If you concentrate on what you don't have, you will never, ever have enough."

Have you noticed in the past several years how public storage units have sprung up all over the country? Think about this: In our very large houses we don't have enough room to store all of the stuff we've accumulated, so we rent other places to put it. Advertisers say acquiring stuff will make us happy. Obviously not, or we would be happy most of the time because most of us have more stuff than our parents and certainly our grandparents ever had, or ever needed.

Previous generations may not have had a lot of material things, but they had something we appear to lack — contentment. To be content is better than being happy. Contentment is akin to satisfaction. Maybe the reason Mick Jagger couldn't get any satisfaction was because he was looking for it in the wrong place.

Author A.J. Jacobs says, "I've started to look at life differently. When you're thanking God for every little joy — every meal, every time you wake up, every time you take a sip of water — you can't help but be more thankful for life itself, for the unlikely and miraculous fact that you exist at all."

Mr. Jacobs has an attitude of gratitude. Try it and see what difference it makes in you and in others. If you do, you might realize what it is like to be contented.

Cal Thomas is a syndicated columnist and author. Readers may email him at: tcaeditors@tribune.com.



SYNDICATED COLUMNIST

Let's talk about 'America on black' crime

OK, fine. Let's talk about "black on black" crime.

That, after all, is where the conversation seems to inevitably turn whenever one seeks to engage a conservative on the American habit of shooting unarmed African-American boys and men. So it was exasperating, but nowhere near surprising, to see former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani go there last week on "Meet the Press."

Asked by host Chuck Todd, during a discussion of the Michael Brown shooting in Ferguson, Mo., about the fact that African-American communities like that one are often served by snow-white police departments, he offered some perfunctory words about the effort to produce more representative cop shops. But then Giuliani took a sharp turn off topic and into the brambles. "I find it very disappointing," he told Todd, "that you're not discussing the fact that 93 percent of blacks in America are killed by other blacks. ... I would like to see the attention paid to that that you are paying to this."

There followed a sharp exchange with another panelist, author and professor Michael Eric Dyson, which produced this parting shot from the mayor: "The white police officers wouldn't be there if you weren't killing each other."

Somehow, he managed not to call Dyson "you people." In nearly every other respect, Giuliani's words reeked of a paternalistic white supremacy unworthy of a former mayor of America's largest city — or even a sewer



Leonard Pitts Jr.

worker in its remotest Podunk. But again, this has become the go-to "reasoning" for those on the right — Sean Hannity, Lou Dobbs, Rush Limbaugh — when asked to give a d—n about the killings of unarmed black boys and men.

That formulation is false for multiple reasons.

In the first place, being concerned over the shooting of unarmed black men hardly precludes being concerned over violence within the African-American community. Giuliani and others suggest a dichotomy where none exists.

In the second place, they ignore the obvious: When black people commit crimes against black people, they face prosecution, but when police officers (or certain neighborhood watchmen) commit crimes against black people, they face getting off with little if any punishment.

In the third place, what exactly is "black on black" crime?

Do black people kill one another? Sure they do. Ninety percent of black murder victims are killed by black assailants.

But guess what? White people kill one another, too. Eighty-three percent of white victims

are killed by white assailants. See, the vast majority of violent crime is committed within — not between — racial groups. Crime is a matter of proximity and opportunity. People victimize their own rather than drive across town to victimize somebody else.

So another term for "black on black" crime is crime.

But there is crime and there is crime.

Redlining, loan discrimination and predatory mortgages have stripped generations of wealth from the African-American community. What is that if not robbery?

The Republican Party practices policies of voter suppression. That's the assault and battery of African-American political rights.

Mass incarceration criminalizes the very existence of black men and boys. That's the rape of equal justice.

Unarmed people are killed by those who are purportedly there to protect and serve them and the "just us" system looks the other way. That's the murder of basic human rights.

It is touching that Giuliani and others are so concerned about black on black crime. But African-Americans have also been long oppressed by what might be called "America on black" crime.

When do you suppose they'll be ready to talk about that?

Leonard Pitts Jr. is a columnist for the Miami Herald. Readers may write to him via email at: lpitts@miamiherald.com.