



# Rockland Buzz

## A Hive of Free Bees

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### HOW MUCH IS NOT ENOUGH?

by Steve Carroll

On November 3rd Rockland voters will be asked whether a city wide minimum wage should be created that would gradually increase to \$15. The Rockland City Council at their September 14th meeting voted 3-2 to send the Minimum Wage question to voters.

This is just the latest proposal by Rockland's newest city councilor Nate Davis. His bold proposal, if approved by voters, would increase the local minimum wage to \$13 by January of 2022, \$14 the following year and \$15 by 2024. I asked Nate if the city had the authority to mandate a local minimum wage. "Yes, the City does have the authority, Portland & Bangor have historically had minimum wage ordinances," Councilor Ed Glaser, who opposed the proposal, stated: "My reason for opposition is fairly simple. I support the effort for a living wage and if there is not enough action on the Federal & State level, then towns need to step up and protect our workers. But as an elected representative I also have to reflect the wishes of the community and in this case most of the input I received was against the change." Business organizations strongly oppose the ordinance. Tom Peaco President of the Pen Bay Chamber of commerce stated in a recent Courier article: "Instituting a plan to exceed the States Minimum wage will have a negative impact on Business." The Retail Association of Maine Issued a similar letter.

The new law, if approved, would only apply to companies with over 25 employees. I asked Mr. Davis if he knew how many companies this would affect and if he could name any of them. "First statewide, according to the center for economic Policy, 63% of Maine workers work somewhere with at least 25 employees. For Rockland specifically, I tried to estimate closer numbers using data from the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages and I think that probably a little over half of workers in Rockland work somewhere with more than 25 employees, but that is just an estimate. Even though this ordinance might only cover roughly half of Rockland workers, it would still hopefully exert upward pressure on all wages. As to which business specifically, I'm not sure, but we can make some intelligent guesses, the big box stores for example and some of the larger employers in the industrial park. It's not full-time employees it's all employees."

Councilors Valli Geiger, Ben Dorr & Nate Davis voted in favor with Ed Glaser & Lisa Westkaemper voting in opposition.

**Councilor Ed Glaser will be my guest on next week's Metro show, Wednesday, September 23rd, 5 to 6 PM on Rockland's only local Radio station WRFR 93.3 FM.**

### Down Main Street with Phil Groce

## Hidden Jewel

With a window looking out on the street and sidewalk, the manager of the Brunswick Rooming House on South Main, Robert Waterman, sits comfortably in his office, manning incoming phone queries, and greeting the residents as they tread by his open door. The door in the far wall of his office leads to his own one-bedroom apartment.

"Three years-ago I came to clean the place up," Robert said to me. "Under previous management they were getting 2 to 3 police calls a week. It's been down to zero in the last 2 years. My sole purpose was to rein in an untenable building. Twenty-two years ago I came up here from New Jersey for a two-week vacation and decided to stay. First thing I noticed was that my car insurance went down from \$1200 to \$350." Where in New Jersey?

"I grew up in Atlantic City, graduated from high school there and began working in the casinos. My father was a cook, and I started in the kitchens and worked my way into kitchen management—basically managing everything other than cooking. I could walk into a place and reorganize it. People complain about the cost of living here, but they don't have a clue what it's like in New York or New Jersey. I did get married--no kids, happily divorced for 30 years.

"When I arrived here, I started at a shipyard, part-time I also had a hot dog cart at the public landing. It's just another restaurant, only smaller. I was also selling books. I buy them up here, and take them to New Jersey to sell them—it's easy to find books to buy here. Lots of people read in Maine, and dealers buy them, then sell to me. I did that for 8 years—part-time, but living here."

Just then he answered the phone. "Yes, we have some rooms . . . no hot plates, but you can have a microwave . . . full kitchen that everyone can use, and a community dining room . . . yes, okay to smoke in your room, but not in any common areas . . . three complete bathrooms, common to all . . . no marijuana in any common areas . . . yes, \$50 deposit . . . I'm in the office until 5:00." He hung up and turned to me. "He'll be in later today." I commented that he must see a lot of people come and go.

"We have some long term, but mostly it's about 6 weeks. That's time enough to save up a little money and find a job, and find another place to live. It's like being in a dormitory here, but it's a rooming house, the only one in the community. Used to be lots of them around, but in most towns, they are regulated out of business. It's a hybrid between a hotel and an apartment. No tenants' rights. I can make anyone leave if they act up. To live here, you have to get along with 29 other people. As it turns out, mostly it's men here, but a few women.

"I'm fair, but firm. I don't put up with shenanigans. For most of the poor, this is the only option. It's expensive to rent in this town--\$800 for a single, and the deposit can be upward to several thousand dollars—including the first and last month's rent. I find the landlords around here to be mostly greedy. I don't have a credit card—never wanted one, but some years ago I wanted to rent an apartment, and though I had thousands in the bank, they wouldn't rent to me because of no credit card." Just then a client shuffled in.

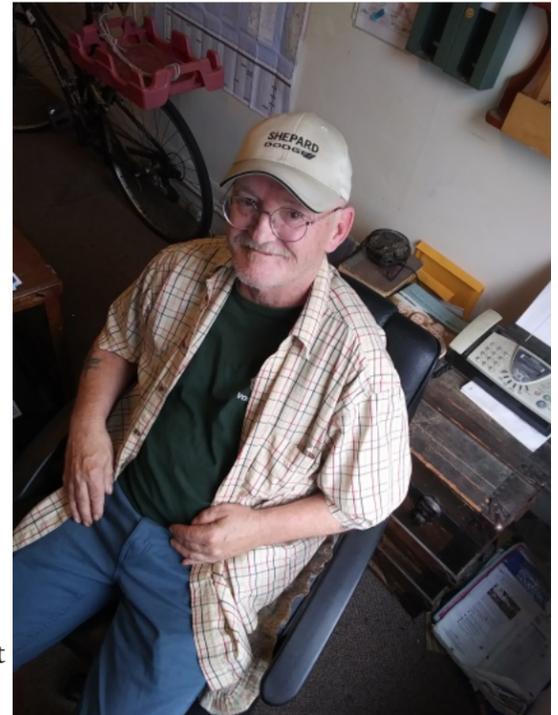
"Hi, Lou." They briefly talked about one of the clients being taken to the hospital the previous day, apparently a heart problem. Robert turned to me, "Lou is my longest client—here since 1996." Lou nodded his head and smiled through his beard, and then used his two canes to slowly go outside, happy to be able to walk.

"You know," said Robert, "Lou used to run this place years ago. You got to do things other than just answer the phone and deal with the residents to pass the time." He gestured to the collections of bark salt and pepper shakers on one shelf and several displays of crushed pennies in frames. "I buy and sell vintage collectables. I started as a kid dealing comic books and baseball cards. Now I have an eBay 2nd level store—that's up to 500 listings, and that's nothing. Some guys have up to 60,000 listings." How about Craig's List? "That's more like a newspaper ad," he replied.

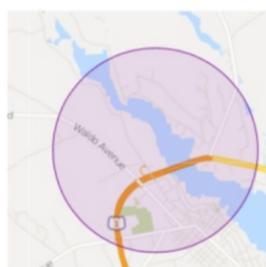
"I think I've rented to just about all the poor people around. I see a lot just looking out my window." I noticed an old bicycle leaning against the wall. Is that for sale? "No, I ride that around." It had a sizeable box on the rear for hauling things.

Do you have to clean the place? "No, but I have good help from a fellow who fixes things and also keeps the place very clean, especially the bathrooms. Bathrooms are a big deal, and when I see people who have moved out, usually they say they are so happy to have their own bathroom."

So, do you get a lot of clients when the festivals come to town? "No, we are just about always filled by then. You see, this is a place where the short-term workers can stay at a reasonable price. Motel and restaurant workers stay here. Where else can they stay for what they make? You just don't realize how valuable this place is to a community. It's unfair to run it down—just because the people who use the place don't have much money. They're good people, and the ones who cause trouble are very shortly gone. This is no underworld hang out anymore. No Sir.



3/8 tcw Engagement ring - \$300 (Belfast)



condition: as new  
make/manufacture: Kay Jewelers  
size / dimensions: Size 8

It's a beautiful ring that I will not wear again. I am willing to meet you at Kays (Augusta) for appraisal. Possible trades, let me know what you have! I just need it gone! I am willing to meet within reasonable distance. 3/8ct, real diamonds, engagement ring. The price is OBRO asking \$300 to just get rid of it or offer a trade. Comes with all the paperwork. It is a size 8!

\*\*\*I will not ship it, I don't have PayPal. With that being said, I will ignore your message if you want me to ship it.\*\*\*

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# CAN THE PLAQUE SAVE AMERICA?

by Joe Steinberger

Ch 4.

Democracy is potentially the best way to govern, if the goal is government in the public interest. This is because people tend to look after their own interests first, and tend to pay less attention to the interests of others -

especially when their own interests conflict with those of others. Putting the public, that is the whole people, in charge as equals - one vote each - is a way of putting the interests of the majority first.

The majority rules, but it is a shifting majority. As everyone will be in a minority some of the time, so it is in everyone's interest to respect principles of fairness and to respect minority interests. Of course in practice, and in detail, it works out in various ways, and sometimes works badly.

The failure, historically, has been the tendency for so much power to be concentrated in so few hands that it becomes possible for these "special interests" to organize their forces and control the government behind the scenes. The ways in which this works are varied, but at the top are various forms of bribery. Much such bribery is perfectly legal under our current federal law, much of which has now been written by the lawyers and lobbyists for the bribers themselves. They have now so much power that the people we elect to office must follow their advice, even when, unfortunately, is not in the public interest.

This unbalancing "vicious cycle" of ever concentrating wealth and power is a force, a gravity, that must be countered with other forces or our democracy will fall.

One force to resist this gravity is the strong foundation we get from our Constitution and our democratic tradition. This is a magnificent heritage on which we can build, but such a foundation is not enough, we must maintain a living spirit of democracy. We must be excited to be on a glorious team that is expanding the frontiers of civilization, and creating happy prospects for generations to come.

Not everyone will participate in the same way. We must have those with shovels, those with words; energy and vision; eagerness and patience; and one overarching quality: love.

Understanding how best to build and maintain that spirit must be our goal. When we cannot get along and respect each other as people, when we cannot respect each other's diverse perspectives and interests, we fail at democracy.

Ancient Greek democracy fell, the Roman Republic fell - and the result was misery for the great majority who became an impoverished and powerless underclass. American democracy is not immune. We could become a nation of a few wealthy aristocrats with their "educated" lackeys, and the majority of us a hungry and desperate mass.

For now, under the oligopoly of our two corrupted political parties, we seem to be headed in that direction.

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## WEEK TWENTY-SEVEN

### COVID-19 RANDOM NOTES WHILE SHELTERING IN PLACE

by Phyllis Merriam

I gave in to feeding the crows this morning. They keep coming around for breakfast and I feel badly withholding food. Popcorn and cheesy bits were scarfed up quickly.

Broken Wing brought her young offspring. And no disruptive gulls this morning.

I have been thinking a lot about covid-19. How it will continue to be an invisible threat for years to come. Here we are, six months into sheltering-in-place, with another year to three years predicted. It will be at least another winter thru the fall of 2021 for sheltering until a safe vaccine will be widely available. Who will develop the vaccine? Who will get the inoculations and when remains a mystery. Will a vaccine be effective? Will anti-vaxers refuse to help protect their fellow humans? How many more deaths in America and around the world? How many of us will be able to tolerate another 18 months to three more years of trying to cope with covid?

Whenever I start to feel sorry for myself, I remind myself of our west coast burning and all the displaced people with destroyed homes and belongings. Where do half a million people in Oregon go? And now our southern east coast is being flooded. It must feel like trying to survive a double pandemic.

I just heard of a new word to describe what's happening during the pandemic:

"Infodemic" - the spreading of incredible misinformation from the president and Internet sources. Facebook, Qanon & other social media platforms are rampant with false "information" such as COVID-19 is a "hoax." Tell that to the relatives and friends who have lost loved ones in almost 200,000 American deaths and counting.

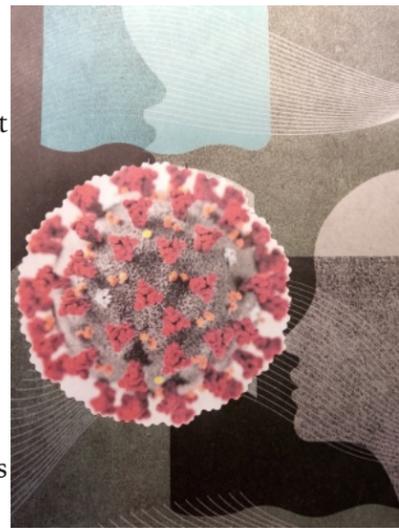
I've learned another new word: "Zoonosis" - any infection or disease transmitted from animals to humans. Think "wet markets" in China or other examples, such as Ebola, derived from human-to-animal contact with infected animals.

Scientists have recently discovered there are covid-19 micro-droplets that hover in the air, easily inhaled, unlike the bigger aerosol droplets that fall to the ground.

I've learned two inaccurate and misleading phrases: "2nd wave" or "new outbreaks" of covid-19. There isn't more covid. There is more viral spread because of human failures to always wear masks, social distance and frequently wash hands. We can't blame the virus. We all need to look in the mirror and ask ourselves if or how we mitigate. Do mask-less 20, 30, and 40 year-olds realize they're the virus spreaders?

Meanwhile, two locals have threatened non-maskers by displaying their handguns.

And speaking of mirrors, this new virus has reflected societal failures to protect our most vulnerable before and especially during covid: Seniors (expendable), front line workers (lacking enough PPE's), people of color (with limited access to health care resulting in chronic illnesses) and domestic violence victims (largely ignored).



## The Inca were right to worship the sun

Funny how people pay attention to the tiniest things, the virus (very small), the political furor, the fires covering the country with smoke, but ignore the biggest thing. The sun. Our neighbor the heating system. Sol, our star, the single biggest factor in life on Earth and nobody pays it any mind. Its face is most of the time covered with spots, flares, and blemishes ejecting tsunami's of energetic particles.

But on the cusp of cycle 25, nothing. The sun's face is as clear as a model's. Good for utilities because that occasional burst of energetic particles slamming into the Earth can shut down the grid. It can over-current giant transformers and cause transmission lines designed for 750,000 Volts to arc when driven beyond millions of volts.

For people like me who's hobby is served by ionization 50 miles up it means more hunkering down. In the good old days when the sun had hundreds of spots (yes, somebody counts them) shortwave signals traveled around the world easily. With NO sunspots I hear mostly static. Those crashes of static are caused by distant lightning strikes. At any moment somewhere there is an electrical storm. The current passing from cloud to earth is thousands of amps and the pulse of electromagnetic energy, enormous. It travels around the Earth but the signals from radios like mine, don't.

Oh I still have people to talk to in Morse code. Lot of European and Russian stations are getting through. But really, they are't far away. Look at a globe. The great circle route the planes fly is also taken by my shortwave signal. Over Greenland, over Lapland, to Moscow and Kiev.

As we pray for the health of family and friends pray too for the health of the sun. When the sun gets sick all our other problems will seem minor.



Glen Birbeck

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