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It’s time for an
honest conversation
about aquaculture

Maine’s seafood industry is well positioned to realize a greener future. Maine waters contain the perfect conditions to grow fish with a fraction of the carbon footprint of beef. Those same clean, cold waters grow the world’s most succulent mussels and oysters. Not only can we grow world-class food, companies like Eimskip and Americold have brought markets in London, Paris and Berlin right to our doorsteps.

For the first time in decades, Maine’s population growth outpaced the national average. We are still aging faster. But we have a shot at reversing that trend as young people, seeing opportunities here, flood our universities to learn about aquaculture and their role in Maine’s future.

Yet in the last few years we have watched the promise of an innovative and dynamic seafood industry be picked apart by groups flying a false flag of environmentalism or “fishing heritage.” These groups are often fronted by real Mainers with real concerns. But hiding behind those men and women in hoodies and bibs are shrewd political mercenaries making a fortune selling a false narrative to otherwise well-meaning retirees and out-of-state families.

Fear sells and nothing is scarier than change. Families from away, long a mainstay of the Maine economy, are noticing the change and are being told the summers they knew as children are under threat from “industrialized aquaculture.” Seen in this light, any innovation beyond the iconic lobster boat becomes the enemy. The ancient practice of harvesting seaweed to fertilize crops becomes a biohazard. Mussel rafts become an intolerable eye sore, and floating oyster baskets become an existential threat to future generations.

Armed with out-of-state-money, these groups enter the fight. They cannot win on the science, because there is little data to back their fear-mongering.

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Instead, they fight behind podiums in front of lay people where unsupported tales of environmental destruction find much less discerning ears.

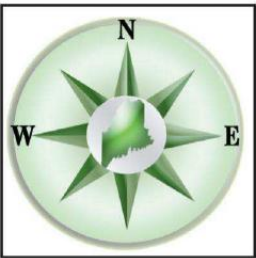
These groups will claim the decision on whether or not to allow aquaculture is “up to the town.” But when a town makes a decision the mercenaries do not like, out come the lawyers to bury those towns in lawsuits.

We are too quick to dismiss people as NIMBYs. Local people and families from away who are affected by a proposal have a compelling argument: it is not fair to ask one group to shoulder the burdens of change when the benefits of that change flow to everyone else. But that argument loses all moral authority when made by someone falsely claiming to be interested only in the environment or in preserving some imagined way of life.

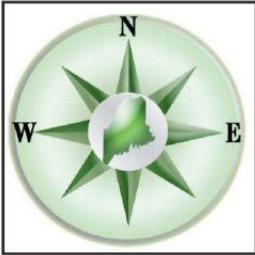
We owe it to the youth of Maine to have an honest conversation about aquaculture. For some, that means speaking up for the first time about our shared future and their role in it. For others, it means coming out from behind paid spokespeople to speak openly about their fears and the equities of change.

Those who do may not win every argument, but they will save a ton of money, find a deeper love for Maine, and a deeper respect for Mainers along the way.

Attorney Benjamin Ford is principal at Archipelago in Portland.



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Students’ path to success should focus on respect, teamwork

I am compelled to praise Sashi Kaufman’s insights in the Jan. 18 Maine Compass, “Cape Elizabeth parents game the educational system in vain.” She is spot-on when it comes to highlighting the role the educational system plays in the lives of its students, which goes far beyond helping them get accepted to college.

Having taught high school English for 41 years and also publishing a book about the experience, I feel that I have sufficient knowledge to support Kaufman’s stance. I, too, was horrified by the actions of the Cape Elizabeth parents who tried to help their teens cheat on their assessments in order to improve their grades and “beat” their competition (classmates). Quite honestly, grades are but a small portion of the formula which helps high schools produce positive, hard-working, happy human beings.

For youngsters to become successful/fulfilled individuals, much needs to be done. Society should realize that it’s a monumental team effort. It starts at home, with a caring, supportive environment which reinforces hard work, compassion, and respect for oneself and others. In most cases, the home is where kids spend the majority of their time,

therefore it is the environment where they should be exposed to the most effective “lesson plan.” Unfortunately, with the high divorce rate and technology-dependent society (which is constantly bombarded with misinformation), today’s youth must rely on additional sources, and this is where our school system plays an important role.

It is a fact that the amount of time spent in school is second only to the home (and in some cases ahead of it). Common sense dictates that many life lessons are learned/reinforced in the classroom. Hard work, respect, compassion, teamwork, and social skills all play a huge role in helping a student morph into a productive, happy adult. Subject matter is indeed important, but if students have these other attributes, subject matter takes care of itself.

Kaufman shares in her editorial, “There are so many ways to live a happy and fulfilled life with or without a four-year degree from a prestigious university.”

I can honestly say that a large part of my students are quite successful, without going to Harvard or Yale. In today’s world, I believe a community college should be the next step for many high school graduates (and in many cases it’s free). It’s an

effective stepping-stone for young adults who aren’t quite confident with their career choice yet. In fact, one of my most successful graduates (both economically and socially) did not even attend college. His work ethic, social skills, personal skills (along with his academic skills) have placed him at the top of his class, so to speak. I am so proud of the person he has become (without higher education).

He was not only a student of mine, but also a member of a team I coached. I had the highest respect for him then, and this feeling continues.... I certainly feel like a “Proud Dad”.

With this said, I must add that another “leg” of the educational system which helps kids become successful adults is sports (or other extracurricular activities). It is not the winning that helps kids grow; it’s the practices and how athletes handle personal setbacks. Unfortunately, there are many coaches and parents who stress winning at all costs, but ironically, it’s the reaction to losing which creates very positive results. My next book will explore the role athletics play in the formation of a person who is positive, happy, and a contributor to society. Parents like the ones in Cape Elizabeth who tried to game the educational system in vain are abundant in athletics as well; they are referred to as “Helicopter Parents” (chapter one in my next book).

In both the classroom and in sports, optimism, hard work,

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teamwork, and choosing to look at the positives, are life skills learned/reinforced. Hopefully these lessons are not interrupted by parents who want to “help” their children by cheating, berating officials and coaches, and focusing on the “win.” It is the process that help produce happy, respectful, hard-working adults. If these attributes become part of the child, then the rest takes care of itself.

After all, it’s a winning formula,

and I applaud Sashi Kaufman for having the insight to share it. Kaufman is spot on to write: “The richest learning experiences are meaningful, not in the ways they prepare us for what comes next, but in the way our understanding is transformed so that we experience our world with more color, detail and nuance than we did before.”

It’s a great lesson plan.

Thomas Wells lives in Wayne.



Why Mainers’ experiences
with chronic pain matter

Chronic pain affects more people than diabetes, heart disease and cancer combined. Nationwide, about one in four adults experiences chronic pain and, in Maine, the number is estimated to be even higher — about one in three. Women experience chronic pain at higher rates across all age groups and counties. And the burden of chronic pain in Maine increases significantly with age: most Mainers who experience chronic pain are aged 50 to 55, and half of those who are 65 or older live with chronic pain.

Chronic pain is a serious public health issue that affects daily life, limits activities, and strains families, communities, and the medical system.

As a biomedical science researcher studying pain for almost two decades, I have seen firsthand how chronic pain can consume someone’s life. I have heard countless stories of missed family functions and lost family and friends, and I have no doubt that anyone can identify a family member, a relative, or a friend whose life has been negatively affected by chronic pain. Patients, clinicians, service providers, and researchers all ask the same burning question: What can we do to relieve Mainers’ pain?

The first step is to gather accurate data to guide us in finding the most appropriate and effective solutions for Mainers. Laboratory results produced in controlled settings with small populations are valuable for specific research goals, but they cannot capture the full picture of the complexity of chronic pain

and its interactions with individual, societal and environmental factors.

Maine’s rural geography, significant veteran population, dearth of public transportation, and limited health care access present special barriers to improving pain care across the state. That is why we need Maine-based data to drive Maine-focused solutions to chronic pain.

In 2011, the National Academy of Medicine, formerly the Institute of Medicine, called for the establishment of national registries, databases, and research networks to guide chronic pain research and treatment. More than a decade later, there are still no nationwide or Maine-specific pain registries. That is why I launched PainRegistryforME, an anonymous online survey designed

to gather firsthand data from Mainers living with pain. Supported by a seed grant from the Northern New England Clinical and Translational Research Network through a collaboration with MaineHealth, this registry aims to fill the gap in our understanding of chronic pain across the state.

Anyone 18 or older living in Maine who experiences pain daily or on most days may participate. The survey collects information not only about participants’ pain and pain management but also on socioeconomic status and living environment — key factors that shape pain outcomes. However, building a truly representative pain registry requires broad community input. This is where all of you can help.

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If you or someone you know lives with chronic pain, I encourage you to take the survey and bring your responses to your health providers to guide discussions about treatment. Encourage individuals who experience frequent pain to respond to the survey and spread the word about the initiative to family, friends, neighbors and health care providers. By contributing to this registry, you are helping to build a resource that will inform better pain care strategies, public health policies, and research efforts aimed at improving lives in Maine.

Looking ahead, with the maturation of the University of New England’s Center for Pain Research, my goal is to establish a comprehensive pain hub in Maine — an initiative that would bring together patients, caregivers, researchers, public health experts, and policymakers to improve pain management statewide. With collective effort and the continued growth of PainRegistryforME, we can take meaningful steps toward relieving chronic pain in Maine because Mainers’ experiences matter.

Let’s work together to make a difference.

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WHEN WRITING

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