

Cabdriver dress code debatable

Mike Cooper, the owner of Town Taxi in Bangor, doesn't have problems with most of the new rules proposed for cab companies that want to continue doing business at Bangor International Airport.

He agrees with the airport officials who wrote them that all cabs should be insured, inspected, and clean inside and out. And, yes, the people who drive them should be courteous, clean and, of course, sober.

It's the dress code being proposed for cabbies who pick up or drop off fares at the airport that is making him and his 12 drivers feel a bit warm under the collar these days.

"Would these qualify as shoes?" Cooper asked Wednesday morning, propping a Bean-booted foot on the top of his desk. "They seem to have a little dirt on them, too, so I guess that might get me thrown out of the airport."

As he spoke, one of his cabdrivers swept through the office. Under the proposed rules, the man's blue denim shirt would be deemed appropriate attire but his nylon wind pants and sneakers might constitute a violation.

"But he's still neat and clean," Cooper said in his driver's defense, "and that ought to be more than adequate."

The proposed dress code, announced earlier this month at a meeting of the city's taxicab regulation advisory committee, states that only "clean shoes" would be allowed — no sandals. Collared shirts with long sleeves are "preferred," though short sleeves are "approved." Khaki style pants are preferred, though khaki shorts and clean, neat jeans without tears or holes are acceptable.

The new rules, which have yet to be discussed by the full taxi committee, also stipulate that drivers must be well-groomed and have an overall clean appearance.

"It's all incredibly subjective," said Cooper, one of four cab company owners on the committee. "Are they saying drivers must be clean-shaven, and is length of hair an issue? The way it's worded, I just don't know. Does that leave the enforcement up to some security guard who happens to be in a bad mood that day?"

Assistant Airport Director Tony Caruso has said that because a visitor may get his first impression of the city through the cabdriver who picks him up at the airport, "We want it to be a pleasant one."

Cooper has no argument with that notion. His only question is why airport officials don't think drivers can make a pleasant first impression while wearing a clean T-shirt.

"Most cabdrivers in the city feel the need for a neat appearance," he said, "but they think that the collared shirt and khaki pants thing is going too far."

Rod Ronco, a dispatcher and driver for Dick's Taxi in Bangor, couldn't agree more.

"Our drivers think it's unnecessary," he said, wearing a potentially unacceptable clean red T-shirt. "They joke about it on the radio, saying 'I can't go out there, I'm not wearing a collared shirt.' I can understand the airport's point, but they're not the ones in the cab for 12 hours a day."

Except for a few cabs that prefer to do most of their business at the airport, Ronco said, the city's 40-cab fleet and 80 to 100 drivers spend at least 95 percent of their time catering to the "downtown business." That means carting people to stores, medical appointments, and to and from bars. That means loading and unloading groceries, lifting wheelchairs and strollers in and out of cabs, cleaning up after messy drunks and sloshing through plenty of shoe-muddying weather.

"When it's the middle of summer and your cab isn't air-conditioned," Ronco said, "a driver might want the comfort of shorts and a T-shirt."

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TOM WEBER

State House age requirement advances

BY A.J. HIGGINS
 OF THE NEWS STAFF

AUGUSTA — The opportunity for an 18-year-old to serve in the Maine House became only slightly more tangible Wednesday when the Maine Senate narrowly approved a proposed constitutional amendment lowering the current minimum age requirement from 21.

The 18-16 vote in the Senate followed last week's action in the House on LD 1912 when the state representatives approved the proposal, 74-67. Both votes, however, are far short of the two-thirds majority required to place the resolution on a statewide ballot to allow voters to

determine if they favor amending the Maine Constitution.

State Rep. Emily Ann Cain, D-Orono, the bill's lead sponsor is also the state's youngest representative at 25. She expects the measure could come up again in the House today. Cain hopes to steer the debate away from what she described as "the flip attitude" that holds "young people don't have enough experience" to serve. She concedes she will

have her work cut out for her in trying to convince two-thirds of the House to support her bill.

"I'm going to do my best," she said. "It's certainly raised the level of discussion around the state and I've been really pleased by the numbers of 18-to-20-year-olds who have joined in."

Although the bill did not address the 25-year-old age requirement for members of the Maine Senate, several sena-

tors had plenty to say about the bill. Sen. Elizabeth Schneider, D-Orono, reasoned if Americans can serve their country in the military during a time of war, they surely should be afforded the opportunity to run for state representative.

"We entrust in them our lives and yet we won't allow them to serve in the House," she said.

Sen. Debra D. Plowman, R-Hampden, argued against the bill, beginning her list of reasons for opposition with the fact that she "was once 18, 19 and 20."

"I have to tell you that I made some of the worst decisions of my life in those three short years," she said. "I'm also the

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Senate narrowly approves constitutional amendment to lower age from 21 to 18 for representatives

Cold Start



AP PHOTO

Klara Krisova of the Czech Republic pushes off at the start of a training run on the downhill course Wednesday at the U.S. Alpine Championships at Sugarloaf USA in Carrabassett Valley. The competition runs through March 29.

Locals oppose Allagash management plan

BY BEURMOND BANVILLE
 OF THE NEWS STAFF

FORT KENT — Tuesday night the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands reiterated its stance on the proposed revision of the Allagash Wilderness Waterway Management Plan: it is not their intention to close access points, remove bridges over the Allagash River or to bar outboard motors under 10 horsepower from the AWW.

Still, nearly a dozen northern Maine residents of some 60 present rose to the podium at a public hearing at the Fort Kent municipal building to express opposition to planned changes to the 1999 Management Plan.

A dozen members of the BPL's Advisory Board attended the session, some of them querying speakers about their

information and clarifying information.

Many Northern Maine residents have opposed the proposed new plan since November. They claim that their voices have not been heard about road access to

"I just want to be on the river whenever I like, and wherever I want to."

Stanley Pelletier

some camping areas on the northern end of the AWW, about disallowing the use of 10hp motors and constant attacks on bridges used by logging enterprises in the northern Maine woods.

"You are constantly reducing our access to this river," claimed Don Tardie of Winterville, a former logging company official and user of the Allagash. "That's why we are here tonight."

"I just want to be on the river whenever I like, and wherever I want to," Stanley Pelletier of St. Francis said. "I don't want to take anything away from other people who come to the river. We can all use it together."

Peter Hilton of Presque Isle, a former advisory board member, told the panel that residents of northern Maine support a bill by Sen. John L. Martin, D-Eagle Lake, and Rep. Troy Jackson, D-Fort Kent, because that will guarantee their use of the Allagash.

A straw poll of the people at the meeting

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This stamp, which features a painting by Alabama artist Larry Chandler, shows the ivory-billed woodpecker. Chandler painted a picture of the woodpecker so scientists could showcase the bird, which was thought to be extinct, when its rediscovery was announced in spring 2004 by federal officials. In an effort to raise money to preserve the bird's habitat, conservationists are publishing the commemorative stamp. The money will go to the Big Woods Conservation Partnership, a coalition aimed at protecting the Cache River bottoms where the woodpecker lives.



AP PHOTO

Sighting of extinct woodpecker challenged

BY KEVIN MILLER
 OF THE NEWS STAFF

Nearly a year has passed since the reported discovery of an ivory-billed woodpecker in an Arkansas swamp sent the nation's birders into a frenzy — and touched off a quiet quarrel in the scientific community.

Now a Colby College ornithologist is among a team of researchers going public with serious doubts that the ivory bill has risen Lazarus-like from America's list of extinct species.

Their conclusion?

The bird caught on film in an Arkansas swamp looks too similar to a pileated woodpecker — a species heard knocking on trees from Florida to Nova Scotia — to declare that the ultimate find of American birders has, indeed, been found.

"The question we are answering is: Is there definitive proof or evidence that the ivory bill is out there? We do not have that yet," said Louis Bevier, a research associate in Colby College's biology department.

Bevier joined with David Sibley — one of the nation's best-known bird illustrators and authors — and biologists Michael Patten and Chris Elphick to analyze the evidence presented by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in support of the ivory bill's continued existence.

The Cornell group, based in Ithaca, New York, shocked the birding world in April 2005 when it published a paper in the journal Science claiming the first proof of the ivory bill since 1944. The

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Public works director in Belfast resigns post

Man charged with stealing fuel from city tank

BY WALTER GRIFFIN
 OF THE NEWS STAFF

BELFAST — Public Works Director Wesley A. Richards resigned his position one day after police charged him with stealing diesel fuel from the city's bulk storage tank.

City Manager Terry St. Peter said he accepted Richards' resignation, effective the end of the day Wednesday. Richards, 58, of Stockton Springs had worked for the city for 29 years.

St. Peter said he expected to begin the search for a new director immediately. He said the city would advertise the position and also post the opening internally. He said he planned to meet with employees of the department and inform them of the process.

"Whenever somebody quits or retires it's always good to talk to the people who work for him and not keep them in the dark about what's happening," St. Peter said Wednesday.

Police were alerted to allegations that Richards may have been taking fuel by highway department employees. Police

Chief Jeffrey Trafton said the department learned of the situation in December and immediately mounted an investigation. He said the highway department assisted with the investigation. The investigation wrapped up Tuesday when Richards was issued a summons for theft by unauthorized taking.

"The dilemma for us was how to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that it was happening," said Trafton. "We were all hoping we were going to prove it wasn't happening."

To build their case, investigators used a hidden remote camera obtained from the state police criminal intelligence division and traceable chemical marker that was added to the diesel fuel kept in the city's bulk storage tank.

Detective Michael McFadden eventually determined that Richards pumped fuel from the city's tank into a storage tank on the back of his city-owned pickup truck. He then would drive to his home in Stockton Springs where the diesel fuel would be

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