



the weekly anthropocene



dispatches from the wild, weird world of humanity and its biosphere

By Sam Matey

2018 Election Special: Exclusive Interview with Maine State Senate Candidate Linda Sanborn

On Thursday, July 26th, this writer interviewed Linda Sanborn (pictured), the Democratic Party nominee for State Senator for Maine Senate District 30. Her district includes all of Gorham, most of Scarborough, and most of Buxton. A lightly edited transcript of this exclusive interview follows. This writer's questions and remarks are in **bold**, Dr. Sanborn's words are in regular type. ***[Bold italics]*** are clarifications and extra information added after the interview. Dr. Sanborn's campaign website is available at lindasanborn.mainecandidate.com.



On your website, you call for capitalizing on the opportunities presented by renewable energy, in order to spur job growth in Maine. This is a much-needed step, but it would take a lot of work. As you know, Governor LePage has consistently vetoed bills that would make it easier for Mainers to generate solar energy. If elected, what would you do to move Maine from stalling on renewable energy development to leading on this issue? Hmm. I can't say I have a particular bill in mind, but I do know that there have been good bills brought forward by legislators who are more familiar with the policy and working with these kind of industries. There are lots of options for us in solar and offshore wind in particular. The Environmental Strategies group is looking at using wood products to get rid of plastics-I know that's not the energy sector directly, but it's the same issue, of protecting our environment and using our natural resources in a positive way. ***[For more about this project, from the Environmental Health Strategy Center, check out www.ourhealthyfuture.org/issue/build-biobased-economy.]*** I'm going to be a big supporter of those kinds of policy. If I had someone who brought bills to me that would help do that, I'd love to sponsor that kind of thing.

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Moving to renewable energy is imperative. However, as I'm sure you know, many of the effects of climate change are already being felt. I'm sure you're familiar with this. Here in Maine, we're seeing heavier tick loads,



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hotter summers, new vector-borne diseases, more flooding due to sea level rise, and substantial shifts in the Gulf of Maine's ecosystem. There's also been specific research done on the threat that sea level rise poses to your district. A 2014 study published in the journal *Ocean & coastal management* used GIS mapping to evaluate Scarborough's preparedness for sea level rise. *[The study is called **Assessing the vulnerability of coastal infrastructure to sea level rise using multi-criteria analysis in Scarborough, Maine**].* They found seventeen critical infrastructure vulnerabilities, including a major evacuation route on Pine Point Road that's extremely vulnerable to flooding. How would you help your district and Maine as a whole adapt to sea level rise and other effects of

climate change? Well, once again, I think we have to be willing to invest in policy that will help change what we're doing to the environment. Again, I'm not saying I have any particular bills in mind. But you know what? Most people are totally unaware of what you're talking about. Those voters in Scarborough-some people say to me, when I'm knocking on doors there, that the most important issue is lowering taxes. They're not thinking ahead to the major policy changes that we need to be willing to invest in. We need to be able to look more than one election cycle down the road and really know

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what's happening over the next 10, 25, 50 years, and how we can protect our neighborhoods and jobs. The first step is always awareness. I think it takes political will to stand up and invest in the kind of policies that will change things. And there, I think I can be a strong voice. **That's awesome.** I was on the Appropriations Committee for the last two terms I served in the House. Who knows where I would get appointed if I won, but I know that I would always be willing to support the kind of investments that we need. **It's very refreshing to hear that; most politicians don't think more than one election cycle ahead.**

This leads into my next question. You're a physician, I believe, and you practiced medicine in Gorham for years before you moved to focusing on community service. Climate change, particularly warming temperatures, causes a lot of health risks. Maine is already seeing an increase in the tick population, which increases the danger of Lyme disease. New vector-borne diseases like eastern equine encephalitis and West Nile virus have already spread into Maine. And, of course, hotter summers increase the risk of heatstroke and dehydration. With your experience, I'm interested in how would you help your district and Maine as a whole respond to these health challenges? I think it keeps cycling back to the fact that if we don't slow global warming we're not going to be able to affect it. It still takes investment in policies that will bring change. A lot of it is advocacy, being able to



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stand up and speak out for change. A group called Physicians for Social Responsibility put out a report called *Death by Degrees*, which addresses exactly these problems, like the increased tick populations. **[Check it out at psrmaine.org/resources/climate-resources/].** It also has to do with our air quality problems in this state, like chronic obstructive lung disease and asthma—that’s a big problem in this state. If we don’t advocate, we can’t change the direction that we’re going. I’ve been a member of that group [Physicians for Social Responsibility]. I’ve supported it in a small way, but one of the reasons that I decided to run for the legislature and try to work on community service is because if I can’t support these groups financially, I can at least be a voice for change. **That’s an excellent sentiment, ma’am.**

“If we don’t advocate, we can’t change the direction that we’re going.”

So moving on from climate change: your district is home to several areas of outstanding natural beauty, from Gorham’s beautiful Presumpscot river shoreline to Scarborough Marsh, Maine’s largest salt marsh and a haven for migratory birds. If elected, what will you do to help preserve, manage, and promote wild and naturally beautiful areas in your district and across Maine. Well, that’s an area where we need to be willing to invest. Some voters don’t understand why that’s a priority, we need to show them the impact that it will have. I think the Land for Maine’s Future investments have been great, and they’re fortunately supported by the great majority of Maine people. **[Learn more about this excellent program at www.landformainesfuture.org/].** So we need to be willing to make those kind of investments. More locally, there’s a group that works with the Presumpscot. **Friends of the Presumpscot?** Yes, and there’s another, the PPR...something, the same kind of group. **[The PRLT, or Presumpscot Regional Land Trust, is another awesome local organization.]** Participating locally in these kind of groups, bringing attention to them, and supporting them financially, is a great way to do your part. I can’t say I’ve been as directly affected by Scarborough Marsh, but I’ve knocked on a lot of doors in Scarborough. I was in a lot off Black Point Road, and...you can’t ignore the great beauty of that area. And it’s a lot more than how pretty it is, with the bird migration and so on. I know the Endangered Species Act is under threat at the federal level, and that’s just a huge step in the wrong direction. I feel like we have to change direction. **I agree.**

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I personally support a lot of your policies. Could you tell our readers about the competition? You're running against incumbent State Senator Amy Volk, of the Republican Party. Why are you and your policies better for Gorham, Scarborough, and Buxton than Ms. Volk and her policies?

I've actually been waiting for a list of votes that Senator Volk has taken. One that I'm aware of was a couple of years ago, when there was a big compromise bill in regards to net metering and solar energy. I was really disturbed to find that Senator Volk had voted against that compromise bill. She supported a smaller kind of compromise, which might have been helpful. But when we had so many players at the table, she voted against that huge, collaborative, commonsense effort to keep investing in solar in this state. That's a huge move in the wrong direction, and I would not be on that same path as Senator Volk.

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Thank you for answering all of my environment-related questions. Is there anything else you want to say? Well, you see my T-shirt. [It read "Ask me why bad science makes bad medicine."] That's awesome. I feel like at my

core, I come at issues with a basis in science. I think it's incredibly frightening that we are willing to just ignore what science is telling us and instead believe in ideology. I think that whether it was when I was practicing medicine, or taking votes in the Legislature, I think we always need to understand how the evidence backs up what we are promoting or moving against. I think my T-shirt most refers to a bill that I introduced in the Legislature in regards to immunizations.

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[Representative Sanborn introduced LD 471, "An Act to Improve

Childhood Vaccination Rates." The Legislature passed it, but it was vetoed by LePage]. There was this article in a British medical journal, years and years ago, that talked about the link between autism and vaccines. The article was withdrawn, it was found to be bad science, and yet people still hang on to that and insist on this link between autism and immunization. We really need to learn how to read, understand, and interpret scientific articles. We need to know about well-written, peer-reviewed articles that we can base things on, and then use that to make good health policy or good environmental policy. We've got to get back to believing in science, and we seem not to be doing that. **I think that's very inspiring, and I totally support that. We need more scientists and physicians at all levels of government. Thank you very much, Ms. Sanborn. Thank you for caring.**