



# the weekly anthropocene



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

## 2018 Election Special: Exclusive Interview with U.S. Senate Candidate Zak Ringelstein.

On Thursday, June 12<sup>th</sup>, this writer interviewed Zak Ringelstein (pictured), the Democratic Party nominee for Maine Senator, via Skype. This will (hopefully) be the first of a series of interviews focusing on environmental issues with candidates running for office in 2018. A lightly edited transcript of this exclusive interview follows. This writer's questions and remarks are in bold, Mr. Ringelstein's words are in regular type. ***Bold italics*** are clarifications and extra information added after the interview. Mr. Ringelstein's campaign website is available at [ringelsteinformaine.com](http://ringelsteinformaine.com).



**On your website, you call for moving to an economy that generates all energy from renewable sources. This is a much-needed step, but it would take a lot of work. If elected, what specific policy initiatives would you enact to make this happen in Maine and the nation?** Thank you for asking that question. So I'm starting to roll out what we call a Green New Deal, and what that means is that we need to do everything humanly possible to save our planet. America does not need to be a follower, or to lag behind in that. We need to get to a fully renewable energy-powered system by 2035. There is no reason now that we should be using coal, or that we're even putting investments into oil and gas. It shocks me that we're talking about the free market while companies like Exxon and their global lobbyists are controlling policy and ensuring that we are not leading in renewable energy infrastructure like we could be. We could be doing a whole lot better. **Yeah, we could definitely be doing better. So you would support cutting subsidies for oil and gas and instituting tax breaks for renewable energy, as part of your Green New Deal?** Yes, exactly. We need to talk about what it would take to invest in this renewable energy ecosystem, and one of those things is carbon taxes. **For more on carbon taxes, check out [carbontax.org](http://carbontax.org).** We have a major problem. We can't understate the problem. We're sold the idea that this global warming thing isn't a big deal. It is a big deal. We need to do everything possible in the next 10-20 years to mitigate the effects of climate change. We're already starting to see weather pattern changes, occurrence of natural disasters that exceed anyone's expectations. Coral reefs are basically going to be almost extinct in the next 20-30 years. What's that going to do to our marine life? So yes, we need to start penalizing people who are emitting carbon into the air.

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I agree with that, and that leads nicely into my next question. Moving to renewable energy is imperative. However, many of the effects of climate change are already being felt. Here in Maine, we're seeing heavier tick loads, hotter summers, new vector-borne diseases, more flooding due to sea level rise, and substantial shifts in the Gulf of Maine's ecosystem. How would you help Maine and the nation adapt to climate change? It's a great question. We know that Maine's waters are, I think, the second-fastest warming waters in the entire world, and that's really scary. *This is indeed the case: for more, check out [goo.gl/AKXFS1](http://goo.gl/AKXFS1).* We don't just rely on our waters for security, we rely on them for our economy. One of the things that baffles me is that there are forces in this state trying to prop up corporate politicians. For example, Angus King introduced a gas pipeline bill to the US Senate that would bypass community and tribal rights so that, essentially, we'd get more gas pipelines running under our feet. And we have environmental groups actually supporting him! At the same time, we're seeing our lobster population move north! This is bad for our economy, bad for our culture. **That is an excellent statement on how important this is, but what specific actions would you take to help Maine adapt its economy to a world changed by climate change?** We need to look at the global challenge of this and then think about how we can solve this locally. America is a leading contributor to global warming, but we are not doing much to solve the problem, especially after we backed out of the Paris Climate Agreement. We need to figure out how to lead the fight... The way that I think about the Green New Deal is that we can have it both ways. We can have a rising economy that's creating new jobs and we can save our environment at the same time. I met an amazing couple in Portland the other day, they run Maine Standard Biofuels. They take residual oil from kitchens across the state of Maine and convert that into biofuel that fuels ships, cars, and trucks. That's a great example. *Check them out at [mainestandardbiofuels.com](http://mainestandardbiofuels.com).* If we were making targeted investments in this state in the renewable energy economy, we could be a leader. We have one of the best opportunities to do solar here in this state. We have incredible natural resources, we have a group of workers who want to work but don't have work. We need a targeted investment in building renewable energy jobs and an expansive infrastructure that meets the needs of all people, protecting our environment, and saving jobs, and building our economy at the same time.

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**You speak about targeted investment, and this very neatly brings me into my next question. You have proposed a “Prosperity Corps” for Maine. I’m very interested in this idea, could you tell me more about it?** Absolutely. We need young people in this state. Only a couple of counties are growing. One of the reasons is that there have not been investments made in areas where there's literally been an economic depression. We're losing our rural hospitals due to population declines. Our infrastructure is poor, not only our bridges and our

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roads, but our broadband. I'm a young dad, and I want to live here, but it's hard to get good work here in Maine. We do a great job of educating kids, and then all of our workers and talent move out so that they can get better jobs. We need to attract people here by saying, Hey! We'll forgive your student loans and get you a good job with decent pay and health insurance, if you do one of a few things. Work on infrastructure. Start a business. Work at a renewable energy business. We can revitalize our community with the power we have in this state and this country. **So the Prosperity Corps is essentially a structure that offers incentives to young people to move here and do jobs that benefit the state.** It's a win-win, because not only are they getting jobs in our state, but their work grows our economy. By literally billions, if done effectively.

**Maine's Second Congressional District, which comprises most of northern and central Maine, is in the throes of a long economic downturn. However, it boasts some incredible wild areas, from the Allagash Wilderness Waterway to Baxter State Park to the new Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument. How would you leverage the Second District's natural beauty to create jobs and wealth for Mainers?**

So...everyone wants to live in Maine. Some people don't like the hard winters, but there's literally no one I know that doesn't love Maine. We have these natural resources-solar, tidal-I'm talking about renewables right now, but we also have an abundance of land. There's a great opportunity there to use that land responsibly. We can preserve a lot of that land, obviously, but we also need to use it in a smart way. Post-World War II, there was a movement to give land grants to state schools throughout America. It was a way to encourage people to go to college and grow the economy. Some of the most reliable economic areas, even in downturns, are college towns. We can give some of our land to colleges-maybe part of their mission could be to protect the environment. There's a myriad of ideas and ways to think about this. We have a lot of smart people in this state, and we need to come together as a state to solve these problems. If there was an airport, if there was some energy, if there was broadband...we could get out of this idea that we're just a tourist economy. We're a lot more than that. **So we need a mindset shift.** 100 percent. I'm very concerned about Maine. The top three employers here are hospitals, government, and Hannaford's. That's not a real economy, guys. We don't have a thriving private sector here in Maine, we have a tourist economy we rely on and a private sector that's been declining for decades. There's been no real investment in our private sector. Has our state gotten any better since Angus King took office *[as governor]* in '94? I think the answer is no! We've declined on health and economic rankings, we are not attracting young families, our hospital, education, and prison systems have gotten worse. Where are we going?! We need to stop this, and we need investment in things that actually change people's lives for the better.

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**If elected, you would be the first of the millennial generation in the U.S. Senate. Two-parter here: what does that mean to you, and what advice would you give to other young people who want to get involved in civic action?** Our generation is a force that is ready to take over and fix and heal America. Our generation was promised

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that we could go to college and then everything would be all right. And then we were all saddled with-you know, for just me and my wife alone-\$150,000 in debt. I was a sophomore during 9/11, I was in high school when the Iraq War started. I love our country, I believe we can be a beacon of freedom. But we're being squished-we're told to take part in the workforce, but then wages are so low we can barely make money. This is not the America I believe in. This is mandated by greed, by forces we didn't create. We need to rise up, take back the country that we love, and end this desperate, greedy, selfish situation. We need young people who have not been broken by the system to stand up, not take money from the forces of corruption, and stand up to fight in the most defining crisis.

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**So, I personally support a lot of your policies. I do have one major reservation, though, that I think is shared by a lot of progressive Mainers. You're running in a three-way race for this Senate seat, against Republican nominee Eric Brakey and the Independent sitting senator, Angus King. Senator King caucuses with the Democrats and votes with them on most issues. I think the question a lot of people are asking is, why should we vote for you, as attractive and inspiring as your policy positions might be, when we already have a fairly progressive Senator in this seat?**

Angus King is not progressive. Angus King has voted with Donald Trump almost 50% of the time, he has voted to confirm the vast majority of Trump's cabinet, and he's simply not a Democrat. First of all, he cosponsored the bill to deregulate big banks, he voted for mass surveillance, he voted to introduce that gas pipeline bill I mentioned earlier, he voted against a bill to prevent military sexual assault. He does not support Medicare for all, he does not support divesting from fossil fuels, he's taken over \$1 million in corporate PAC money. I find it sickening that we've gotten to this place where we're willing to let the bar go so low. I like Angus King. I like his mustache, I like his lobster emojis. But I don't think he is the right fit for our country in this very dangerous time. This is a quote from him. “I am uncomfortable with Democrats because their first line of defense is regulation-tax the rich, government is the solution.” Well, Angus King, we need to tax the rich, and sometimes government is the solution.

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**Is there anything else you want to say?** There are a couple things here. One is making it clear that I am not accepting any money from corporations, PACs, or lobbyists. Also, ranked-choice really negates the spoiler effect. If you like Angus's personality but don't like his policies, you can rank me one and him two. That removes some of the fear from this election. You can vote for who you like, not who you've had for a long time. **Thank you very much, Mr. Ringelstein.** Thank you, Sam. Take care.

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