
Mailhot's Sausage

Charlotte Michaud

1-28-1980

Lewiston Journal Article, Meat Petition

Nancy Grape

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/michaud-mailhot>

Recommended Citation

Charlotte Michaud Papers, Franco-American Collection, University of Southern Maine Libraries.

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Charlotte Michaud at USM Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mailhot's Sausage by an authorized administrator of USM Digital Commons. For more information, please contact jessica.c.hovey@maine.edu.

Meat petition draws sharp criticism

By NANCY GRAPE
Political Writer

The truth of the old saying, "One man's meat is another man's poison," may be tested tomorrow at the State House.

Officials of Maine's state meat inspection program face potential grilling by lawmakers on effort to rally support for continuing the program, funded at a total 1980 price tag of \$255,000 in federal and state money, following initial legislative suggestion that it be phased out.

The questions will come from members of the 109th Legislature's Audit and Program Review Committee at a public hearing scheduled for 1:30 p.m. at the State House.

The committee, charged with Maine's 'Sunset Law' review of existing state departments and agencies, has initially recommended that the state meat inspection program, affecting meat which does not cross the state line, be phased out for an estimated Maine General Fund yearly saving of \$114,000.

Currently, federal inspectors oversee Maine's five commercial poultry processing plants as well as nine meat processing plants and five slaughterhouses.

State inspectors oversee about 21 meat processors, 14 slaughterhouses and 65 "custom exempt" operations which slaughter and process animals brought to them by owners for their personal use.

"If Maine's program is eliminated, the federal government would assume the state's inspection responsibilities. Since inspection standards are the same under either program, the public would have the same protection and meat packing establishments would have to conform to the same standards regardless of who does the inspections," the Audit and Program Review Committee declared in its initial report submitted Dec. 31 to the Legislative Council.

Since that time, however, some committee members have become angered behind the scenes at what they see as improper, self-inspired effort to develop a groundswell of support for continuing the 12-member state inspection department without the knowledge of State Agriculture Commissioner Stewart N. Smith.

"You just don't do that," Lewiston Rep. George B. Berube, co-chairperson of the committee, said today.

Focal point of the committee's concern is

a "petition," which Rep. Berube has determined comes from officials of the state meat inspection department. Rep. Berube is critical of both the method and of information contained in the document, which suggests lawmakers "need public input on this proposed federal takeover."

"In the Maine program," the petition declares, "12 personnel oversee 33 commercial meat plants and over 60 custom plants. The federal agency in Maine inspects 19 facilities with about 120 personnel."

The petition states the committee's bill would terminate the state program, "possibly as soon as" next July 1.

"Maine Commissioner of Agriculture Stewart Smith endorses this move because he feels the funds could be better spent on a \$600,000 reorganization plan for our department," the document declares, noting, "Inspection is offered free to packers and is ultimately paid for by you the taxpayers and consumer."

The petition, which says "more information" is available from the Division of Inspections, offers citizens two columns

Continued On Page 12, Col. 1

Criticism

Continued from Page 1

under which to sign: "I favor leaving meat inspection as is" or "I favor USDA takeover of all Maine meat inspections."

"There's no way of knowing how many of these petitions have been returned," Rep. Berube said today. "It has only been by sheer accident that a petition was sent to the Commissioner's office — and that's how it was discovered that a petition was sent out."

Agriculture Comm. Smith feels similarly cool toward the petition effort. "It's certainly undesirable procedure from my standpoint," he told *The Journal* today. "It's not really proper procedure."

Was the petition prepared on state time? "I suspect it may have been," Smith replied. Has he reprimanded the officials involved? "Not a written, official reprimand, no," Smith answered. How about a verbal, unofficial reprimand? "Yes," the commissioner replied.

Clayton F. Davis, director of the Inspections Division, was out of his office and unavailable for comment this morning.

Comm. Smith was asked how he feels about activity that runs at cross purposes with his own decisions. "Obviously it's very disappointing," he said. "Unfortunately, the way the personnel system is structured, there's not much that can be done about it."

Both Rep. Berube and Comm. Smith take direct issue with information contained in the petition.

"It says the program could be terminated possibly as soon as July 1," Rep. Berube pointed out. "That is inaccurate in that it would be phased out, possibly over three years."

"It also says that the federal agency in Maine inspects '19 facilities' with 'about 120 personnel.' The facts are that there are 180 federal inspectors. However, they are spread out over four states in New England," Rep. Berube underscored.

Comm. Smith suggests that these figures "would lead" people reading the petition "to believe that the federal inspection is

much less effective than the state service, and that is not necessarily correct. It was the way they used numbers."

Smith also reacted to the comment contained in the petition about his proposed "\$600,000 reorganization plan," saying this comment "implied that the meat inspection program was tied into the Agriculture Development Act, which is part of the Governor's economic development package, and that is not true. The two are not related."

The Agriculture Commissioner believes the petition grows out of dual concern about jobs to be lost if the state meat inspection program is discontinued and out of what he called a "genuine" belief by department officials that the state program is beneficial to the people it serves.

"There is some benefit to the industry from having a state-operated program," Smith acknowledged. "I think the question you have to ask is, 'Are those benefits greater than the cost?' And I think when you put it in that context, the answer is negative."

"It's difficult to cut any program," the commissioner declared. "No matter how expensive a program is, it's always benefiting somebody — and somebody's going to come in and say, 'You're taking that program away from me.'"

Smith said he believes the legislative committee has "made a good, honest effort to make this government a little more efficient."

In addition to her other objections to the petition, Rep. Berube, for her part, believes it was poorly timed. "This was being done before the public hearing," she declared. "We don't even know what the result of the hearing will be or if we will recommend other changes in the final bill."

Will the committee put its questions to meat inspection officials tomorrow? "I'm sure there will be some questioning by the members of the committee," Rep. Berube declared. "I assume there will be."

page 1
Lewiston
Journal
1-27-80

Meat petition draws sharp criticism

By NANCY GRAPE
Political Writer

The truth of the old saying, "One man's meat is another man's poison," may be tested tomorrow at the State House.

Officials of Maine's state meat inspection program face potential grilling by lawmakers on effort to rally support for continuing the program, funded at a total 1980 price tag of \$255,000 in federal and state money, following initial legislative suggestion that it be phased out.

The questions will come from members of the 109th Legislature's Audit and Program Review Committee at a public hearing scheduled for 1:30 p.m. at the State House.

The committee, charged with Maine's 'Sunset Law' review of existing state departments and agencies, has initially recommended that the state meat inspection program, affecting meat which does not cross the state line, be phased out for an estimated Maine General Fund yearly saving of \$114,000.

Currently, federal inspectors oversee Maine's five commercial poultry processing plants as well as nine meat processing plants and five slaughterhouses.

State inspectors oversee about 21 meat processors, 14 slaughterhouses and 65 "custom exempt" operations which slaughter and process animals brought to them by owners for their personal use.

"If Maine's program is eliminated, the federal government would assume the state's inspection responsibilities. Since inspection standards are the same under either program, the public would have the same protection and meat packing establishments would have to conform to the same standards regardless of who does the inspections," the Audit and Program Review Committee declared in its initial report submitted Dec. 31 to the Legislative Council.

Since that time, however, some committee members have become angered behind the scenes at what they see as improper, self-inspired effort to develop a groundswell of support for continuing the 12-member state inspection department without the knowledge of State Agriculture Commissioner Stewart N. Smith.

"You just don't do that," Lewiston Rep. Georgette B. Berube, co-chairperson of the committee, said today.

Focal point of the committee's concern is

a "petition," which Rep. Berube has determined comes from officials of the state meat inspection department. Rep. Berube is critical of both the method and of information contained in the document, which suggests lawmakers "need public input on this proposed federal takeover."

"In the Maine program," the petition declares, "12 personnel oversee 33 commercial meat plants and over 60 custom plants. The federal agency in Maine inspects 19 facilities with about 120 personnel."

The petition states the committee's bill would terminate the state program, "possibly as soon as" next July 1.

"Maine Commissioner of Agriculture Stewart Smith endorses this move because he feels the funds could be better spent on a \$600,000 reorganization plan for our department," the document declares, noting. "Inspection is offered free to packers and is ultimately paid for by you the taxpayers and consumer."

The petition, which says "more information" is available from the Division of Inspections, offers citizens two columns

Continued On Page 12, Col. 1

page 1
Lewiston
Journal

1-28-80

Criticism

Continued from Page 1

under which to sign: "I favor leaving meat inspection as is" or "I favor USDA takeover of all Maine meat inspections."

"There's no way of knowing how many of these petitions have been returned," Rep. Berube said today. "It has only been by sheer accident that a petition was sent to the Commissioner's office — and that's how it was discovered that a petition was sent out."

Agriculture Comm. Smith feels similarly cool toward the petition effort. "It's certainly undesirable procedure from my standpoint," he told *The Journal* today. "It's not really proper procedure."

Was the petition prepared on state time? "I suspect it may have been," Smith replied. Has he reprimanded the officials involved? "Not a written, official reprimand, no," Smith answered. How about a verbal, unofficial reprimand? "Yes," the commissioner replied.

Clayton F. Davis, director of the Inspections Division, was out of his office and unavailable for comment this morning.

Comm. Smith was asked how he feels about activity that runs at cross purposes with his own decisions. "Obviously it's very disappointing," he said. "Unfortunately, the way the personnel system is structured, there's not much that can be done about it."

Both Rep. Berube and Comm. Smith take direct issue with information contained in the petition.

"It says the program could be terminated possibly as soon as July 1," Rep. Berube pointed out. "That is inaccurate in that it would be phased out, possibly over three years."

"It also says that the federal agency in Maine inspects '19 facilities' with 'about 120 personnel.' The facts are that there are 180 federal inspectors. However, they are spread out over four states in New England," Rep. Berube underscored.

Comm. Smith suggests that these figures "would lead" people reading the petition "to believe that the federal inspection is

much less effective than the state service, and that is not necessarily correct. It was the way they used numbers."

Smith also reacted to the comment contained in the petition about his proposed "\$600,000 reorganization plan," saying this comment "implied that the meat inspection program was tied into the Agriculture Development Act, which is part of the Governor's economic development package, and that is not true. The two are not related."

The Agriculture Commissioner believes the petition grows out of dual concern about jobs to be lost if the state meat inspection program is discontinued and out of what he called a "genuine" belief by department officials that the state program is beneficial to the people it serves.

"There is some benefit to the industry from having a state-operated program," Smith acknowledged. "I think the question you have to ask is, 'Are those benefits greater than the cost?' And I think when you put it in that context, the answer is negative."

"It's difficult to cut any program," the commissioner declared. "No matter how expensive a program is, it's always benefiting somebody — and somebody's going to come in and say, 'You're taking that program away from me.'"

Smith said he believes the legislative committee has "made a good, honest effort to make this government a little more efficient."

In addition to her other objections to the petition, Rep. Berube, for her part, believes it was poorly timed. "This was being done before the public hearing," she declared. "We don't even know what the result of the hearing will be or if we will recommend other changes in the final bill."

Will the committee put its questions to meat inspection officials tomorrow? "I'm sure there will be some questioning by the members of the committee," Rep. Berube declared. "I assume there will be."