

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 24, 2026

Celebrating our country's 250th birthday has provided a unique opportunity to reflect on the character of our state today and how it will evolve in the next quarter millennium.

You may be wondering, what was the great state of Maine like 250 years ago? Who swam its coastlines and hiked its peaks? What buildings lined the Main Streets from Kittery to Rockland?

Selecting an item that transcends time and answers these questions for you is nearly impossible, but I do believe this book, *Blueberries for Sal*, can do as good a job as anybody at defining the spirit of our state in 2026.

Wild blueberries, as I am hopeful you know, are a small, tangy, and sweet fruit, rich in nutrients and antioxidants. Native to North America and first harvested by the Wabanaki people thousands of years ago, 95 percent of wild blueberries come from Maine, though they are now distributed and enjoyed globally.

Blueberries captured the imagination of writer and illustrator, Robert McCloskey, while he spent his summers on an island in East Penobscot Bay. He wrote the book as part of a trio of children's books that harnessed his scenery and family as inspiration. *Blueberries for Sal* was published in 1948 and has since become a staple of Maine families' bookshelves.

Children's books instill the values and lessons that our shape young people's imaginations, and with it, the future of the state and nation. Over the past several decades, Mainers have grown up reciting "kuplink, kuplank, kuplunk" (the sound of blueberries as they hit the pail) and absorbing the book's lessons. Mainers, like Sal, embrace our state's motto and live "the way life should be." They wander off trails to blaze new ones and make unlikely friends. They're resourceful—they forage, hunt, and fish. They enjoy a slower pace of life, get lost in the natural world, and revere its fruits and creatures.

While a book may already seem like an archaic choice in our increasingly digital world, I hope books will always be the vessels that carry forward our stories. For decades, Maine's logging and lumbering tradition have supported the paper and publishing industries. In both creativity and material, this book is truly a product of Maine.

Sadly, both Maine's heritage lumber and wild blueberry industries are under threat in a warmer and more unpredictable world. I am confident, however, about our state's promising future knowing that Mainers are as resilient as wild blueberries. We adapt to harsh, unforgiving environments and grow back collectively because, not in spite of, disruption.

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I can't foresee the challenges of the next 250 years for Maine and the country. We may wander off the trail at times, like Sal and the cub, but my only hope is that we can find our way back home with deeper appreciation for the beauty of the world, understanding of all who inhabit it, and buckets full of blueberries.

Enjoy reading,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Chellie R", followed by a long horizontal line.

Chellie Pingree
Member of Congress
Maine's First Congressional District