

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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ACTS AND RESOLVES

AS PASSED BY THE

One Hundred and Fifth Legislature

OF THE

STATE OF MAINE

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Inaugural Address
of
Governor Kenneth M. Curtis
to the
One Hundred and Fifth Legislature
January 7, 1971

INAUGURAL ADDRESS OF KENNETH M. CURTIS, GOVERNOR OF
MAINE, TO THE ONE HUNDRED AND FOURTH LEGISLATURE,
STATE OF MAINE

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker and Members of the 105th Legislature:

Just over 150 years ago Maine became a free and independent state.

Far-sighted as they were, the men who led Maine into the Union could not have foreseen the vast changes which have occurred in 15 decades of statehood.

We are different from them, and our time is different from theirs.

Yet the things that made Maine great are unchanged.

The rugged beauty of the land remains.

The character and independence of the people remain.

And there remains also the conviction that we in Maine are blessed with a uniquely favorable way of life.

The challenge before us, the elected representatives of the people of Maine, is to expand and preserve that heritage for future generations.

It will not be easy.

For we meet at a time of economic adversity.

Inflation and the cost of living are increasing at an annual rate of six percent, the highest in two decades.

Unemployment reached 5.8 percent in November.

And this is taking place during a period of social turmoil.

Throughout the nation, the institutions and values which shaped our lives for decades are being reexamined. The university, the corporation, the church, most often government itself — all are being challenged to explain and justify their actions, their procedures, their very existence.

These national currents affect each of us as individuals, and they affect our State government.

We feel the effects of inflation because it costs more for less whether you are buying groceries, a new home, or state services.

And we feel the effects of social turmoil in the frequently deteriorating relationship between the citizen and his government.

Where there once was trust, there now is suspicion.

Where there was confidence, there is doubt.

Where there was a feeling of participation, there is a feeling of exclusion, of being left out of the process.

Someone once described leadership as the art of perceiving the will of the people.

If so, then this is a difficult time for leaders. For it is a time of confusion, uncertainty and conflict, and the voices of the people are confused, uncertain and conflicting.

So it is that the people of Maine want improved state services, relief from local property taxes, and they somehow hope to get them without any real increase in taxes.

We, of course, cannot reconcile these conflicting objectives.

But I believe we are moving in that direction.

First of all, we now have a more balanced, productive tax system. While far from perfect, it is nevertheless sufficiently diverse to provide us with some insulation from the ups and downs of national economic cycles.

Second, by reorganizing state government we can provide essential state services faster and at lower cost.

Let me be clear on this point.

I do not suggest that government reorganization is the ultimate solution to our fiscal problems.

It is not.

Even the most modern, efficient government will still face the crushing pressures of necessary services, rising costs and needed revenues.

Those pressures exist now. They will continue to exist in the future.

But government reform can ease those pressures.

And, most importantly, it can help restore the confidence of the people in their government—the crucial element so necessary for effective action in a democracy.

For it is precisely the impersonal, unresponsive nature of government that is the origin of so much of the current lack of confidence.

Incapable of prompt and effective response, our state government mystifies and angers many citizens. Not seeing and return on their tax dollar they react—understandably—by complaining about taxes.

That is easy to do, because nobody likes taxes.

You do not like them.

I do not like them.

But the hard truth is that the tax burden in Maine is not as heavy as it is in most other states.

Consider these facts: The national average per person in state and local taxes paid is \$380. Here in Maine it is \$308, placing us 36th among the states. Among the New England states we are next to the lowest.

I do not cite these figures to suggest that higher taxes are desirable.

I do so first to support my conviction that what bothers people most is the difficulty in relating their tax dollars to visible signs of progress. Convinced of merit and need, Maine people can and will respond. Our problem is that our structure of government makes it difficult to convince them of either merit or need, except when some disaster fleetingly focuses public attention on the worst of our problems.

I cite these figures also to place our position in perspective. It is helpful to view our situation in relationship to other states. By comparison, we are indeed fortunate.

We now have the basis for a balanced tax system, a tribute to the courage of the 104th Legislature which voted into existence a personal and corporate income tax.

I salute those of you here today who helped make that tough decision. I know it was not easy.

But today, because of the productive capacity of those taxes, we face the future with an estimated surplus of about \$30 million for the next biennium.

THE RECENT PAST

An inaugural is traditionally a time of renewal, of thoughts about the future.

So it should be.

Yet, as Lincoln said, we cannot know where we are going unless we know where we have been.

So I think it appropriate to briefly evaluate the recent past, especially since four years have elapsed since the last inaugural.

In Maine, as elsewhere, protection of the environment has become a matter of prime public concern. We responded to that concern by enacting the site location and oil handling laws which make Maine a national leader in the delicate effort to achieve the proper balance between economic growth and preservation of our natural environment.

Yet our concern has not been limited to prohibiting future abuses.

We firmly committed ourselves to a massive cleanup of our air and our waters. By passing the largest bond issue in history to build long overdue waste treatment facilities, we are finally using money, instead of just words, to erase the legacy of a century of neglect.

To meet the growing threat to our greatest natural resource — the Maine coast — the newly established State Planning Office began work on the nation's first comprehensive coastal development plan.

We upgraded the quality of our educational system.

There has been a dramatic increase in State aid to municipalities for education — easing pressure on the property taxpayer — and payments are now made on a monthly basis.

There has been a four-fold increase in vocational training opportunities.

Despite some growing pains, the consolidation of our higher education facilities was a wise step forward.

University enrollment has increased by nearly 5,000 students, and some 20,000 adults now take advantage of the University's adult education program.

We moved to meet the growing housing shortage by establishing a State Housing Authority, and there are now seven factories in Maine producing low-cost homes.

We became the first state in the nation to establish a Rural Youth Corps.

We tripled our support for our Indian citizens, and built new classrooms and water and sewer facilities.

We established a computerized Job Bank to more effectively match men and jobs.

We extended and improved our highway system.

Three jet airports now exist in Maine. One of them, Bangor International, may soon be one of the nation's major international airports.

We established and funded the Bureau of Mental Retardation in an effort to minimize and ease our loss through retardation.

Finally, but not least, we have at long last been making meaningful progress in lifting our state institutions to a position far more capable of serving those who need our help so badly.

Before there were nations or states, men recognized their obligation to care for those unable to care for themselves. But as our societies grew larger and less personal, public institutions too often became a way of removing such people and their problems from the public's sight, and thus from the public's concern.

We are reversing that trend.

This process of improvement must continue. Of the many conflicting demands that will be made upon you, please heed this one — for a people may fairly be judged by the manner in which they treat those among them who need help.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Our goal has been — and remains — to improve the quality of life for every Maine citizen.

We have done much to reach that goal, but much more remains to be done.

We can begin by reorganizing our government to make it more efficient and responsive.

As long ago as 1931 a reorganization plan presented to Governor William Tudor Gardiner described Maine's government as "ramshackle, consisting of many statutory lean-tos without the proper constitutional foundation, not at all integrated in administration and largely lacking in coordination of functions."

How much more true the passage of 40 years has made these words.

You have before you the report of the Legislative Research Committee and the State Planning Office for the restructuring of state government.

Its principal recommendations are the consolidation of the 226 separate state departments, agencies, boards and commissions into 10 departments, each headed by a Secretary appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Council, and serving at the pleasure of the Governor.

I commend these recommendations to you as the foundation of a major reorganization effort. They are the end product of a careful study of the problems of state government. They were conceived in an atmosphere free of partisanship. I hope they will be received, considered and adopted in a similar atmosphere.

In a later Legislative Message, I will make other reform recommendations supplementing those of the Legislative Research Committee.

Our elderly citizens face severe financial problems. Their fixed incomes, eroded by inflation and rising taxes, can no longer meet their most basic needs. Many can no longer maintain the homes where they raised their families and which represent a lifetime of work and saving.

We have recently awakened to the true dimension of their problems. We must now transform that awakening into specific action to meet those problems.

I will present to you a proposal for meaningful property tax relief for the elderly with the sincere hope that you give it favorable consideration.

As I noted earlier the 104th Legislature enacted landmark laws to protect our environment. Now they must be expanded and enforced.

My Legislative Message will include several proposals in this area, including a substantial strengthening of the Environmental Improvement Commission.

To affirm man's right to a clean environment I will recommend the adoption of an environmental Bill of Rights.

The rugged Maine coast is one of nature's greatest gifts to man. Each year it draws more thousands of visitors. Now the pressure of an increasing population with more leisure time beats upon the coast with the force and regularity of the tides. To enable more people to enjoy the power and serenity of the Maine coast, we must authorize the careful use of eminent domain for the public acquisition of coastal lands.

In accordance with Governor Percival Baxter's generous bequest to the people of Maine, we are ready to create state forests and turn unproductive land to worthwhile use.

Our concern with the environment cannot blind us to the need for a continually strengthened economy.

As part of our program of Development Through Conservation, we should adopt legislation that will facilitate the establishment of well-planned, industrial parks. These parks, by concentrating industry in a carefully chosen location, will enhance our continuing efforts to control the environmental consequences of economic growth. They will in addition, provide for the more efficient delivery of supporting services.

Maine's greatest asset is her people. Our exceptional working men and women deserve continued improvement in our systems of workmen's compensation and unemployment compensation. We must accelerate our program of attracting high-wage industries to Maine. And we must increase our minimum wage to \$2.00 an hour on a phased basis.

More people died on Maine's highways in 1970 than ever before. This shameful record requires renewed highway safety efforts in education and control. Difficult as it is to get the message across, we must convince our citizens that driving carries heavy responsibilities. This means new and imaginative programs for driver education. It also means tough enforcement of our traffic laws and a restructuring of the way in which we process violations of those laws. The present system has the dual disadvantage of diminishing the deterrent effect of our traffic laws and of clogging our Superior Courts with traffic offense appeals. It must be changed, to advance our highway safety program and to improve the administration of our judicial system.

Of all the problems we face, none is more dangerous or depressing than the widespread use of drugs, especially among our youth. It is a threat to the very structure of our society. But it is not a uniform threat. The intensity and pattern vary from community to community, a fact which emphasizes the importance of community initiatives in dealing with their own drug problem. Many communities are showing this initiative, and the State must provide financial support for their efforts. We must step up our program of drug abuse education, particularly for those young people who have not yet been trapped by the drug

culture. To be effective, this education must be skillfully conceived and widely offered. We should also place the Interagency Commission on Drug Abuse, created by Executive Order, on a permanent statutory basis, and, in recognition of the complexity of the drug problem, provide for the civil commitment of drug users.

For Maine's Indian population we must continue to improve the conditions of life on the reservations while simultaneously encouraging increased self-government and self-sufficiency. It is far from clear that the State's present administrative and legal relationships to the Indians further these goals. We should reexamine these relationships and be prepared to make basic changes where appropriate.

In education we must continue our recent record of progress. For too many years too many of our young people failed to get the education necessary to develop their talents to full potential. This pattern, at long last, is changing. But our existing commitments should not obscure the need for new directions in education. We must devote more of our resources to the development of community colleges, and to one and two year programs at our existing institutions. We must also develop urgently needed programs in medical education and allied health fields. In educational financing I will propose, for the second year of the biennium, the establishment of a uniform school fund to help equalize the property tax burden among communities in support of public education.

I will also place other important proposals before you, such as the establishment of a Human Rights Commission, and permitting 18 year olds to vote in State elections. In my Budget Message and Special Legislative Message, I will outline in detail my program in these areas, as well as in others I have not discussed today.

In all these areas we have begun to attack the agenda of unfinished business that piled up during decades of neglect.

In an inflationary economy to stand still is to fall behind. And we are already too far behind for that.

We must, rather, move forward prudently until current national trends are reversed, thus permitting more substantial progress. Specifically there must be, at the national level:

A halt to inflation.

A reordering of national priorities, with increased emphasis on meeting our domestic needs.

A program of meaningful revenue sharing with the States.

Until then we must move forward as best we can within the limits of the resources available to us.

We cannot do all that must be done in a single year, or even a single decade.

Priorities must be continually reassessed.

Existing programs must be audited regularly.

Proposals for new programs must be subjected to increasingly rigorous tests.

But we cannot confuse prudence with retreat.

We cannot permit the limits of our resources to narrow the scope of our vision.

For in our temporary trust is the proud heritage of Maine — to be lived, improved upon, and passed on to future generations.

As we begin this legislative journey, let us resolve to cast aside partisanship. Let us work together for the greater good of this place we all love so much. The times demand no less of us.

We will not always agree. Nor should we. For the clash of ideas in public debate is essential to a functioning democracy. But let that debate be based solely upon differing visions of the public interest, not upon any narrow personal or political interest.

Earlier I spoke of the social turmoil in the nation.

For reasons we cannot fully comprehend we have been spared violence and destruction. Perhaps it is our geographic isolation; more likely it is the character and mood of our people.

Whatever the reason, our favorable experience reminds us of the meaning of Maine: a unique way of life that emphasizes people rather than things; quality rather than quantity.

Maine means people with roots and a sense of values in a society that is increasingly rootless and without values.

In many states destruction of the environment has already gone so far as to be irreparable. Fortunately, this is not so here.

In a certain sense, what were once our liabilities in Maine — our relative isolation, our relative lack of development, our wilderness character — have now become assets. But without vision and leadership by state government, these assets will be of little use or comfort to us.

For we must also have good jobs for our people. That will take effort. Even more, it will take imagination, careful planning and the nerve to set conditions.

We must have quality institutions and quality education to complement the high quality of our environment.

We must have good medical facilities.

We must have good housing.

We must do everything we can to eradicate the poverty that is still too widespread here in Maine.

But we are blessed with natural advantages, and we are coming to recognize that we in Maine can achieve that quality of life sought by so many. All we have to do is reach out for it.

But our reach cannot be timid.

We must show the same courage and vision as those men who gathered in Portland a little more than 150 years ago to create a new State. They governed with a strong faith in Maine's destiny.

Having decided to embark on the new adventure of statehood, they did not shrink from the rigors of their task. Their new independence was a cherished opportunity for greatness.

And so it should be with us.

The accidents of geography, the deeds of our predecessors, the course of national events, have given us, the participants in this 105th Legislative Session, another opportunity for greatness.

One hundred and fifty years ago the task was to begin a government. Today the task is to fashion a model state, where spiritual growth and material progress are carefully balanced.

Let us not squander this opportunity.

Let us resolve, in every thought and deed, to make our motto, "Dirigo," more than just a phrase.

Let us, instead, make it a call of hope for all the nation.

Governor of Maine