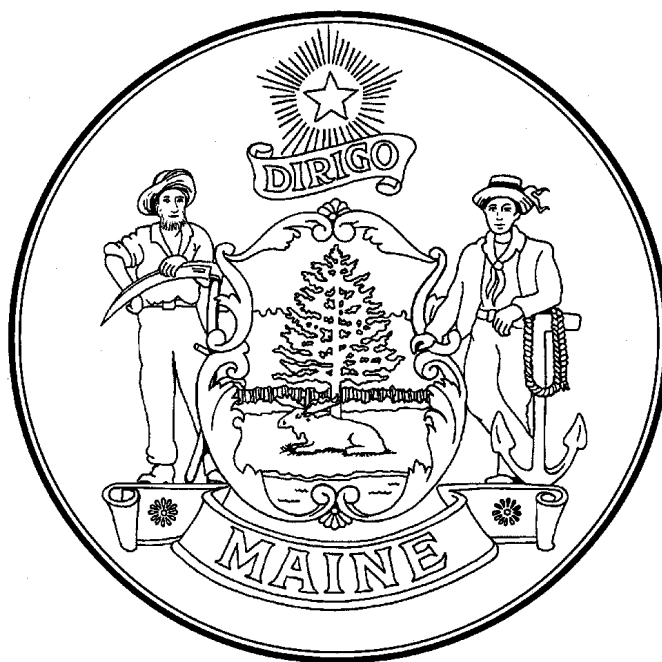


MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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LAWS
OF THE
STATE OF MAINE

AS PASSED BY THE

ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-SECOND LEGISLATURE

SECOND REGULAR SESSION
JANUARY 7, 2026 to APRIL 29, 2026

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2026

STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS
OF
GOVERNOR JANET T. MILLS
JANUARY 27, 2026

(The text of the speech of the Governor appears here as published online by the Office of the Governor)

Governor Janet Mills State of the State Address

PREAMBLE

Madam President, Mr Speaker, Madam Chief Justice, Mr. Attorney General, Mr. Treasurer, Mr. Auditor, Chief Nicholas, Chief McCormack, and Chief Bassett, members of my cabinet, members of the 132nd Legislature, friends and members of my extended and beloved family, Maine people watching and listening at home.

On July 4, 1976, shortly after 4:30 a.m., some five hundred farmers stood in the darkness before dawn. When the first rays of the rising sun shone on Mars Hill, Maine, they cheered and raised the flag as the first Americans to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the founding of this nation.

A celebration that began in Mars Hill soon stretched from coast to coast as millions of people expressed their love for our country after years of division and difficulties. Shootings at Kent State had rocked the nation. The Vietnam war finally came to an end, and Americans looked forward to peace in our time. Our country had survived the national scandal of 'Watergate,' and had put behind us the crimes and cover-ups of those who valued political loyalty over their duty to the courts and to the Constitution. One observer watching the crowds that July 4th day in 1976 said proudly, "the backbone of America is out there."

As the Wabanaki people know, *our* backbone here in Maine is the mountains, from which we draw our common strength and fortitude.

We are the product of many hills, the irregular glacial terrain, the eskers, erratics and roaming boulders that form the character of our people and the destiny of our state.

This very Capitol building towers over the grounds of Capitol Park where Governor Israel Washburn in 1861 mustered "the boys of Maine" to preserve the Union and

end the horrible practice of slavery. From this place we too can see, as did those courageous men, the quiet prominence of Howard Hill, which looks down on us today and which forms the rugged skyline of this Capital city.

Every part of Maine dares us ever to climb, to be discontent with flat spaces and plains and to seek higher ground at every turn, and to be tireless in the defense of our people, our state, our nation.

It is an instinct, an attribute and mark of our character; a reflection of our natural strength that is as enduring and deep as the granite bedrock of Mt. Katahdin. It is what compels us to stand fast against injustice, to rise against tyranny and defend those who cannot defend themselves.

It is an instinct that is as important as ever in this very moment, as people in this state speak with moral clarity to protect their neighbors and their communities against Federal agents who seek to intimidate and to silence us.

Tonight, I say to the people of Maine: We will not be intimidated. We will not be silenced.

And to anyone outside these halls, including any Federal officials, I say: if you seek to harm Maine people, you will have to go through me first.

We will climb *this* hill together, you and I, just as we have over the past seven years, confronting dangerous terrains and stepping out of treacherous places in order to secure a foothold for Maine people in the upward climb of progress.

We enter this, the 250th year of our nation's birth, with continued respect for our founding principles and a commitment to democracy, with an unequalled determination to preserve the future of our country and our Constitution.

Tonight marks my eighth, and final time, addressing a Joint Session of the Legislature.

In every moment that we have gathered in this chamber, it has been my profound honor and privilege to serve

STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS

the people of Maine -- you, who are the very backbone of our state -- as your Governor.

I sought this office with one goal in mind. It was not to break a glass ceiling by becoming the first woman governor, though I am proud to help show others -- particularly young girls -- that that is possible.

It was also not to become the first governor from Franklin County, though I am proud to claim it as my home, along with legendary Maine guide Fly Rod Crosby and earmuff inventor Chester Greenwood and others.

It is the people of Maine who are, and have always been, my North Star, and I sought this office because I believed they deserved better from their government.

It would have been easy for me, and it would have been easy for all of you, to sit back and allow others to carry the burdens of leadership.

But, as Senator Robert F. Kennedy, Sr., once said, "It is more comfortable to sit content in the easy approval of friends and of neighbors than to risk the friction and the controversy that comes with public affairs."

And so, we have assumed the mantle of controversy that comes with public affairs.

But surely no one could have predicted seven years ago the friction and controversies we would encounter, the dangers we would confront, the crises, tragedies, and heartbreaks we would endure, climbing mountains to overcome obstacles and to keep Maine people safe.

Ultimately, history will judge how well we met these moments, but tonight I want to tell you what these moments have meant to me.

I am convinced that history will show that when we faced emergencies, we were steady and strong, and that when we found ways to make life better for Maine people, we were bold and brave and we climbed those hills together.

Beginning in the first year of my administration, we restored nursing and other critical public health staff to respond to emergencies after years of cuts to state government by the previous administration. And thank God those nurses were there -- along with our National Guard soldiers and our health care workforce, active and

SELECTED ADDRESSES TO THE LEGISLATURE

retired, -- to answer the call when a worldwide pandemic struck. Thanks to them, and to scientists who developed the vaccines, and to all the people who rolled up their sleeves, our state achieved one of the lowest COVID death rates in the nation. Very simply, we saved lives.

A few years later, when a horrific act of violence in Lewiston robbed us of eighteen loved ones and caused our state immeasurable pain, we stood together -- with one another, with the families of victims, the Deaf community, the survivors, the wounded, and the heroic members of law enforcement and first responders. And we did not let the vitriol and heated rhetoric surrounding the issue of gun violence immobilize us. Instead, we took meaningful steps to prevent violence, to protect public safety, and expand mental health services.

Later, when deadly storms devastated communities across Maine, we responded with the largest investment in storm relief in state history, revitalizing our working waterfronts, reinforcing infrastructure, and rebuilding local businesses to better withstand extreme weather. We came together to enact bipartisan legislation, sponsored by every legislative leader, to protect homeowners and businesses and prepare for the storms we know are to come.

The backbone of this state -- Maine people -- met these emergencies with strength and courage, in some cases risking their own lives to save others and then offering their help with quiet kindness and selfless acts of grace.

As we reflect upon those moments, let us also remember those we lost this year, including our beloved "Lobster Lady," Ginny Oliver of Rockland; Penobscot tribal elder and decorated veteran Charles Norman Shay; lawmakers such as Kathy Javner, Denise Harlow, Stan Gerzofsky, Linda McKee, Dick Gould, Carol McElwee, Bill Diamond, Karl Turner, Ruth Foster; along with Maine DOT workers James Brown and Dwayne Campbell who tragically lost their lives recently while serving the people of Maine. And let us pause to remember two young children -- Brayden Callahan of Rockland and Simon Gonzalez of Standish -- who lost their lives in the everyday act of just getting on or off a school bus.

Thank you.

As is tradition, tonight I am proud to stand before you – one final time – and say that, despite our challenges, I believe the state of our state is strong.

ECONOMY

Let me talk about the economy.

Under my administration, Maine's economy has grown at a faster rate than many other states. In fact, we experienced more economic growth in my first six years in office than we did in the entire fourteen years before.

I am proud to say we've seen an increase of 16,200 private sector jobs in our state. Last year, nearly 15,000 new businesses filed to operate in Maine. And many other businesses, like Taste of Maine potato chip in Limestone, are significantly expanding their workforce and their footprint.

Through my Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan, more than 20,000 men and women enrolled in our job training programs, many of them earning a new license or credential in a higher-paying job in health care, electrical, welding, plumbing, construction and other occupations.

Maine's unemployment rate has been below four percent for nearly four years – one of the longest stretches ever – and it is consistently below both the New England and the national rate.

Our state's credit ratings have been upgraded to the second highest possible rating, after being downgraded during the previous administration — an upgrade which the credit agencies say is due to our "strong fiscal governance."

At the same time, we have also focused on the infrastructure you rely on every day to go to work, to go to school, and just to get around. We've repaired nearly 200 bridges, repaved nearly 8,000 miles of roads, and, working with hundreds of communities and internet service providers, we've connected more than a quarter million homes and businesses to the internet.

As a matter of fact, right now every person who wants an internet connection has access to one, thanks to the good work of the Maine Connectivity Authority, fulfilling the promise I made to you in 2022. We are making it easier for people to live, work and do business everywhere in Maine.

People like Rob and Alice. They wanted to move to a small town but they needed high-speed internet for work. Seven years ago, there was no way they could move to a place like Bremen, Maine, and have fast enough internet. But thanks to our investments in broadband, that's exactly what they did. Now Alice and Rob are deeply involved in their community and, just this past fall, they welcomed a baby boy to their family.

I am proud of this economic progress. But, like every other state, we have our fair share of hills still to climb.

COST OF LIVING

One of the biggest obstacles for many people today – whether a new college graduate, a young parent, or an older person on fixed income – is the high cost of living.

From health care, housing and utilities to the price of a pickup truck, groceries and life-saving medications, costs are too high – and Maine people, like millions of people across the country, are feeling it.

Tonight, I propose that we do something about it.

AFFORDABILITY CHECKS

Over the past seven years, on several occasions, we have put money back into the pockets of Maine people to help them get through difficult times.

With bipartisan support, in 2021, during the pandemic, we sent over half a million Maine people a Disaster Relief Payment of \$285.

In 2022, again with bipartisan support, we sent Inflation Relief checks of \$850 to 880,000 people.

And in 2023, with bipartisan support, we sent 880,000 Maine people an Energy Relief Check of \$450.

That's a total of nearly \$1.3 billion in relief we've delivered to help Maine people deal with high costs.

We did this in recognition of tough times and in recognition that each family, each person, has different needs. Giving money directly back to them allowed them to decide how best to address those needs.

For 80-year-old Peg in Pembroke, who lives on Social Security, her \$850 relief check meant a tank of heating oil to help keep her warm through the winter. Or, for

STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS

Terri in Hampden, her relief check paid for food and gas and much-needed car repairs. She said, "Please know that all of you have helped at least one person breathe easier."

That's what this is about – helping Maine people breathe easier.

Over the past several months, as my administration put together the supplemental budget that will come before you soon, we asked ourselves again how can we help people in the fastest, most direct, and most meaningful way.

And we thought: why reinvent the wheel, why create a new process, new forms and new hoops to jump through?

So, tonight, I propose that we help Maine people breathe a little easier with what we can, where we can; by sending them an Affordability Relief check, for \$300 each, drawn from our record high Rainy Day Fund to offset in some small way the cost of goods and groceries that are increasing because of tariffs and other circumstances beyond our state's control.

An estimated 725,000 Maine people will be eligible for the Affordability Relief check, and, as in the past, we would cap this at an income of \$75,000 for a single filer [*\$112,500 for head of household*] and \$150,000 for a married couple filing jointly.

We're putting tax dollars back in your pockets, and you will have the freedom to decide what to do with it.

Our Rainy Day Fund – thanks to good bipartisan work of the Legislature – stands at its legal maximum of more than one billion dollars, a balance that is nearly five times greater than when I took office. The fund is in a strong position, sufficient for us to draw upon it to meet some of the immediate needs of Maine people.

I ask that you promptly approve this measure.

HOUSING

And, while we are at it, let us continue to tackle one of the most significant issues facing Maine people – the high cost of housing.

The prospect of home ownership has always been the cornerstone of the American dream, a pathway to

SELECTED ADDRESSES TO THE LEGISLATURE

financial stability, but today, that dream is out of reach for many. The median price for a home in Maine is at \$405,000, a record high that is only slightly lower than the national price of \$414,400.

The national news is filled with stories about the difficulties in renting or buying a house, from California to Connecticut. Almost 30 percent of all Americans are "house poor," that is, they spend 30 percent or more of their incomes on housing. The entire nation is short millions of units of housing, for rent or for sale.

High interest rates, supply chain constraints and labor shortages have made the situation even worse. And the President's tariffs on aluminum, steel and other building materials have driven up costs and slowed new construction at a time when we need it most.

Since I took office, my administration has authorized almost \$315 million to help with housing – nearly five times more than the State of Maine spent on housing production from 2000 to 2018.

In the past year alone, my administration and MaineHousing have financed more than 1,000 affordable homes, mostly new construction. One of those developments is Wilbur's Woods in Brunswick — 21 new single-family homes which have sold for well below the median home price in Cumberland County.

Kathy Amsden has lived and worked in Maine all her life. But when she was getting ready to retire and downsize, she couldn't find a smaller place that was within her budget. When Wilbur's Woods became available, she was one of the first people to move in.

Another new housing development built with state funding is Congress Square Apartments, a 48-unit apartment building in Belfast. One young woman named Linda who works at a local business said she was really relieved to find a place to rent that was within her budget.

Those affordable apartments will keep more young people living and working in Maine.

Together we enacted historic legislation to knock down barriers to housing in Maine, and we created the Mobile Home Preservation fund, helping mobile home residents purchase their own parks before wealthy out-of-

state corporations could swoop in, buy them out from under them, and evict them.

So far, residents have purchased thirteen mobile home parks in Maine, creating long-term stability for these people.

More will follow. In fact, just yesterday, residents of a mobile home park in Jay became the first to sign an agreement to purchase their park under our new Right of First Refusal Law.

A member of the Blueberry Fields Cooperative in Brunswick was afraid that his rent was going to go up by \$400 to \$500 a month when his mobile home park went up for sale. As someone on a very low fixed income, he couldn't pay that; neither could his neighbors.

With state support, the Blueberry Fields Cooperative purchased their mobile home park, protecting it as affordable housing for years to come. As that resident put it, "We are in charge of our own destinies here."

It has been said that "a life is measured not by what you build, but by who you lift." Here in Maine, we're both building and lifting lives up, so that people can be in charge of their destinies.

We can't give up on the American dream, not when young families can't find a house that fits their budget. Not when retirees want to downsize but can't find a smaller place at a reasonable cost. Not when businesses are losing new workers because they can't find housing close by.

So tonight, I am announcing a \$70 million "American Dream" proposal to further expand housing:

First, I propose two new pilot programs, backed by \$17.5 million in one-time funds from our Rainy Day Fund, administered by MaineHousing, to build 530 new homes and apartments for middle-class families.

Second, with another one-time infusion from the Rainy Day Fund, I propose that we increase our investments in our very successful housing programs by \$52.5 million which will in turn trigger at least \$15 million in Federal matching funds.

In total, my "American Dream" proposal will result in 825 new homes all across Maine.

HIGHER EDUCATION & FREE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Now let's talk about education, which represents about 41 percent of the entire state budget.

In the last seven years, we've built a strong pipeline from classroom to career for young people across Maine, from pre-K to post-grad.

We've increased research and development funding for the University of Maine, which in turn has earned a prestigious R-1 designation, placing it among our nation's top research universities.

During that period, the University of Maine system has conferred 42,416 degrees and credentials, including a record number of degrees in high-demand fields like engineering and computing, healthcare, business, teaching, and new technologies. As a result of our investments and UMaine's good work, the System is realizing its seventh straight semester of increased enrollment. Chancellor Malloy, President Ferrini-Mundy, and Board of Trustees Chair, Trish Riley, are here with us tonight, and I want to thank them for their great work.

And I want to congratulate the University of Maine and the University of Maine Graduate Workers Union UAW for recently negotiating their first ever collective bargaining contract.

Similarly, we have increased funding for Maine Maritime Academy for campus improvements and operations over the past seven years, making it an attractive institution for an increasing number of students. Graduates will go on to good-paying careers in the maritime industries. The President of Maine Maritime, Craig Johnson is here with us tonight.

And, finally, we made two years of Community College free.

More than 23,000 students have taken advantage of our free Community College program to date, with many more scheduled to achieve a degree or certificate over the next two years. Nearly two thousand of those students have transferred to the University of Maine or another four-year college.

Free community college graduates have gone on to work in Maine – graduates like Tori Wile. Tori grew up

STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS

in Gray, building things with her grandfather in his woodworking shop and she knew that someday she wanted to be a builder herself.

She couldn't afford to go to college, but our free community college program allowed her to get a degree in building construction technology.

Tori recently helped build a new electrical lab at Central Maine Community College in Auburn. Tori, and Vice President of the Maine Community College System, Dr. Betsy Libby, are here with us tonight, and I want to acknowledge them.

The free community college program has made a life changing difference for thousands of Maine young people. That's why, as part of my budget last year I proposed making it permanent. The Legislature, in balancing many considerations, agreed to continue it through the class of 2025.

Education opens doors of opportunity – and so, tonight, I am taking another swing at it.

Let's make community college free in Maine permanently!

These three proposals – distributing relief checks, building more homes, and making free community college permanent – will provide both immediate and long-term cost relief.

Now, I want to talk about other ways that Maine people can save money – especially as we head into tax filing season.

OTHER TAX SAVINGS IN BUDGET

As many of you know, there is significant tax relief in our current budget to keep costs down for Maine families.

When I took office in 2019, there was \$388 million in direct tax relief for Maine families in the biennial budget.

We've increased it to nearly \$1.1 billion dollars.

What does that mean for the people of Maine?

It means more money back into your pocket.

SELECTED ADDRESSES TO THE LEGISLATURE

In Maine, if you are working and raising a child, you may very well qualify for \$650 through the state's Earned Income Tax Credit.

That's \$650 directly back into your pocket.

What's more, you may also qualify for Maine's \$305 Dependent Exemption Tax Credit for your child – and, this year, if your child is under the age of six, that credit doubles to \$610, thanks to Senate President Mattie Daughtry.

That's another \$610 back in your pocket.

Or, if you are a graduate who is paying off your student loans, you probably qualify for our Student Loan Tax Credit, once known as "Opportunity Maine," which gives you a refundable tax credit of up to \$2,500 a year.

Or, if you are a senior citizen, you might qualify for property tax relief of up to \$2,000 through our Property Tax Fairness Credit, and your pension itself might well be exempt from income taxes.

This is real money back in your pocket. I want every Maine person to take advantage of it.

EDUCATION FUNDING AND REVENUE SHARING

Another way we are fighting to hold down costs is by fully funding the State's share of education.

In 2022, we met the state's obligation to pay 55 percent of the cost of education for the first time in history.

Then, in 2023, we also met the state's obligation to fund revenue sharing at 5 percent, after the previous administration slashed it to 2 percent. That means more money goes back to the towns and cities to pay police, firefighters, road crews, and local services so that less of that cost is borne by the property taxpayers.

My administration prioritized education and revenue sharing because the voters and taxpayers demanded it.

Property taxes are still too high for too many, and we've got a commission – created by the Legislature and signed into law by me – working on that very issue.

But I know that the State of Maine has got to do whatever it can to hold down property taxes, which is why I

am including another \$46 million in my supplemental budget to maintain our commitment to pay 55 percent of the costs of education. I don't want to see those costs passed onto your property taxes.

EDUCATION

But let's also talk about the other things we've done for our schools and public education.

- First, we are providing free school meals for all public school students statewide and we've helped more than 120 school districts provide healthy, locally-grown food from Maine farms.
- We're also repairing crumbling school infrastructure across our state.
- We've expanded early childhood education, with more children enrolled in pre-kindergarten than ever before.
- We raised the minimum teacher salary and added 1,000 teachers to the workforce.
- We upgraded equipment at Career and Technical Education Centers for the first time in decades, and enrollment at the CTEs is at its highest level ever.
- We expanded early college programs to serve 65,000 kids and counting.
- And, Maine's high school graduation rate is the best it's ever been.

Surveys show that Maine students are healthier and happier than they were just two years ago, with a significant number of kids reporting an improvement in their mental health and a decrease in the need to drink, smoke or use other substances to cope.

Still, like many people across Maine, I was concerned when the National Assessment of Educational Progress showed declining test scores from a sampling of 1,800 Maine students in the 4th and 8th grades back in January of 2024.

As the daughter of a long-time public school teacher and as someone who raised five daughters who went to public schools in Maine, it is important to me that every

child acquires math and reading skills to set themselves up for success.

Happily, Maine's own achievement exams, which test *all* 4th and 8th grade students twice a year, actually show better results, with scores that track and even surpass the national norms.

While that broader data is encouraging, we want to do more to make sure our students have a world-class education.

And so I directed the Maine Department of Education to strengthen students' reading and math skills.

Out of that directive, the department created the Maine State Reading and Math Action Plans to bring more evidence-based instruction, educator training, and academic partnerships into Maine classrooms and improve student skills.

This effort builds on a \$10 million investment we made in 2024 to encourage schools to adopt the highly successful "Science of Reading" approach to teaching kids how to read. It has turned around poor literacy rates for kids across the country, and it is doing the same here in Maine.

The Department of Education has also worked closely with individual schools to improve their student scores.

Indian Township School Principal Molly Newell in Washington County thanked us, noting that what she's seen is not just better test scores but increased student confidence, deeper understanding of scientific concepts, and stronger preparation for future academic success.

CELL PHONE BAN

And while I'm talking about educational attainment, there is something else that stands in the way of student success; something that has been top of mind for many teachers across Maine, and that is cellphones in the classroom.

We know that social media can be disruptive to the school day and to the mental health of young people.

So it's time to get cellphones out of our classrooms.

STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS

Tonight, I propose that we enact a statewide ban on cellphone use during the school day – from bell to bell – to reduce distraction and disruption and to keep children's attention on learning.

When cell phones are removed from classrooms, research shows that student performance improves, test scores improve, behavior improves, attendance improves, and social dynamics improve.

Now, some students may be upset with the idea of a ban on cellphone use at school, and it will be a significant change for some. But I was encouraged by one senior at Morse High School in Bath who told a news station that when his school implemented a cellphone ban, he was not fond of it at first, but he later realized it actually gave him more time to talk with his friends in person, including during lunch, instead of everybody looking down at their phones.

Change isn't always easy, but if the past seven years have taught us anything, it's that we have to be able to adapt to new challenges.

This past weekend brought another reminder of our need to adapt when dangerously cold temperatures and wind chills tested our electric grid, just as other extreme weather events have done the past few years.

ELECTRICITY

While the average price of electricity in Maine is typically among the lowest in New England – that's of no comfort to Maine people who are suffering under the weight of high energy bills. I get my CMP bill in Farmington and, like a lot of folks, it's not fun to open.

It's exactly why my administration opposed a massive rate hike request from CMP that the PUC rejected out of hand.

But the high price of electricity is not, as my Republican friends say, driven predominantly by renewable energy policies. Instead, it is driven by our significant overreliance on fossil fuels, primarily natural gas, to generate electricity, especially during peak periods such as cold spells. In fact, more than half of the electricity produced in New England is generated by burning natural gas.

What Maine needs to do is to keep diversifying our energy sources by welcoming more clean energy onto the

SELECTED ADDRESSES TO THE LEGISLATURE

grid in order to offset natural gas. That is why we are procuring more cost-effective clean energy, like wind and solar here in Maine, and hydro from Canada, while pursuing energy storage as well.

At the same time, Efficiency Maine Trust and my energy department will be making available millions of dollars in rebates for high efficiency water heaters as well as heat pumps, and for weatherization and other energy upgrades -- because, after all, the best dollar saved on electricity is the one not spent.

Take the Lovewell family in Caribou, for example. Their 100-year-old family home just wouldn't stay warm in the winter. Snow blew through the old, cracked windows and electric heating bills were in the thousands. With weatherization funds from the state, the Lovewell's replaced 14 outdated windows, insulated their home and made other upgrades which have made their home warm and comfortable and saved them a lot on home heating bills. "Not only did it give new life to an old home," they said, "it gave comfort, safety, and enjoyment to our family."

Their story is not unique. Maine has one of the oldest housing stocks in the country, and while we love these old houses (like I love my own), they are a real bear to heat, especially with oil.

I'm proud that, since I took office, we have cut our reliance on heating oil down from 62 percent to 50 percent of Maine homes, still with a ways to go.

Let's lower energy costs by lowering our reliance on fossil fuels and make all our homes safer and more weather proof.

Another major driver of high costs for Maine people is health care – especially right now.

HEALTH CARE

Here in Maine we've worked hard to expand health care to more people, to small businesses, to the self-employed, and to families across Maine, and we have fought to make coverage more affordable.

On my first day in office, I expanded Medicaid, ending my predecessor's adamant opposition to following the will of the people. And thanks to that move, nearly

SELECTED ADDRESSES TO THE LEGISLATURE

230,000 people, all told, have gotten access to health care, including preventative care like cancer screenings.

In 2020 and 2021 alone, Medicaid expansion reduced the cost of uncompensated care for Maine hospitals by \$126 million.

One primary care doctor in Machias wrote to me about a patient whose life was changed because of Medicaid expansion. A young woman with significant mental health issues was able to restart medications because she now had health insurance. Now she is finishing her GED and going on to nursing school.

"Our state needs more workers desperately," her doctor wrote, "but people need good health to work and MaineCare expansion has made this reality possible."

Besides expanding Medicaid, we've also expanded access to private health insurance through the Affordable Care Act.

Together we enacted the 'Made for Maine Health Coverage Act' which established the state-based health insurance marketplace, CoverME.gov, and which made many preventative care visits free or less costly.

And we codified the protections of the ACA, for instance, barring an insurance company from refusing to cover you on account of a "pre-existing condition." I mean, life is a pre-existing condition, isn't it!?

And while the U.S. Supreme Court and the Federal government have rolled back the right to reproductive health care, we here in Maine fought to protect and expand that right.

We also expanded health coverage for postpartum care and we increased funding for family planning services provided by organizations like Planned Parenthood and Maine Family Planning on which so many people rely for primary and preventive care.

Earlier today I was proud to announce that, once again, where the Federal government has fallen down, Maine will stand tall. I propose in my supplemental budget a one-time appropriation of \$2.25 million in General Funds to replace the money the President and Congress cruelly cut from Planned Parenthood and Maine Family Planning's primary care services.

STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS

The progress Maine has made in health care at the state level is in jeopardy though because of the President and Congress.

As you know, Congress passed and the President signed legislation that I will call the "Big Bad Bill" – a bill that cut billions of dollars in health care funding over the next decade in order to finance tax breaks primarily for billionaires who don't need them.

What a backward policy.

And while Maine will receive \$190 million through the Rural Health Transformation Program, and we will put those funds to use, those funds pale in comparison to the estimated \$5 billion in health care funds Maine will lose over the next ten years.

Because of the Federal government's action, upwards of 33,000 people across Maine are likely to lose access to health care. That means missing out on basic preventive care, such as cancer screenings, and treatment for addiction, and the fundamental, basic care that every person in this state and this nation deserves.

The loss of health care for those folks will lead to increased uncompensated care that will be absorbed first by our hospitals, which are already in a difficult financial position. They will be forced to pass those costs onto consumers – onto Maine people – who will pay more for health insurance or out of pocket care as a result.

And I haven't even mentioned Congress' failure to extend the enhanced ACA subsidies, which has already caused 8,500 Maine people to abandon their health insurance altogether and which is driving up the cost for tens of thousands more who are insured through the Marketplace. And the number of people forced to drop their health coverage because they cannot afford to pay their premiums is only expected to increase in the coming months.

One man from Cumberland told us that if his premiums increase as he expects, health insurance will be the single largest expense for his family, more than his mortgage.

A grandmother from York who is raising her two grandchildren told us that if her insurance rates go up, she'll have to go without her health insurance.

STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS

This is entirely unnecessary. It's wrong. And I want to be clear: people will die because of it.

But look, even the ACA, which has been such a political football, is only a bandaid on the whole problem of health care in America.

And what health care really needs in this country right now is not a series of bandaids, it needs major surgery. Each individual state cannot, and should not, be left alone to grapple with this national crisis.

Because health care is a human right.

Look, the Federal government is capable of big things. It was the Federal government that created Social Security and Medicare. It was the Federal government that passed the Civil Rights Act. It was the Federal government that built the Interstate Highway System. The Federal government sent a man to the moon.

It is time for the Federal government to take its head out of the sand and address the crisis of health care head on.

Nothing short of universal health care is acceptable.

It's an idea whose time has definitely come.

STATE OF DEMOCRACY

Lastly, it is appropriate to pause to share my reflections on the moment we find ourselves in.

In doing so, I speak to you now not as a Democrat or even as your governor, but as a mother, a grandmother, a proud native of Maine, and, very simply, an American citizen who – like you – deeply loves this nation and this state.

But I worry about the future of our country and the fate of our democracy.

I worry about the standing of our country in the eyes of the world and the standing of our country in the eyes of our own citizens.

I believe we are at a dangerous moment in our history – a moment where the very idea of America is in peril.

Maine's U.S. Senator Margaret Chase Smith once told us that the four "Principles of Americanism" were:

- The right to criticize

SELECTED ADDRESSES TO THE LEGISLATURE

- The right to hold unpopular beliefs
- The right to protest
- The right to independent thought

She was right.

But today I see a nation where our Federal government uses its immense power to intimidate, to punish, and to silence those who dare to criticize or question it –

- A Federal government that has deployed masked law enforcement onto the streets of America, including here in Maine, stoking fear in our communities, killing American citizens in Minnesota, and arresting people, not on public safety grounds but based on quotas, on skin color, on accents, on religion on ethnic origin.
- A Federal government that outright ignores the Constitutional rights that are guaranteed to us all, that undermines the rule of law, and that even attacks the courts who uphold it.

For those who may be unconcerned by the Federal government's abuses of today, I only ask you to consider this – what happens when the Federal government finds *you* to be the problem tomorrow?

This is not partisan. This is not about whether you are a Democrat, a Republican, or an Independent. This is not about whether you live in a blue state, a red state, or a purple state – a city, a suburb, or a small rural town.

It is about Margaret Chase Smith's Principles of Americanism – it is about the very essence of America and the fundamental tenet that here, power comes from the people; here the rule of law reigns, here everyone is treated equally under the law, and here we have no kings.

What will our chapter of the American story be as our history is read to our children and grandchildren and to generations yet to come?

That choice is ours today.

And I have hope.

Because when the dawn seems furthest away, one star hangs in the night sky whose light keeps us from stumbling in the darkness. That North Star will always help

us find our way home. And that North Star is the people of Maine.

CONCLUSION

Over the past seven years, I have seen people run towards gunfire to save the lives of children in Lewiston.

I have seen firefighters rush to the aid of a town rocked by a deadly gas explosion in Farmington.

I have seen fire and rescue crews brave howling seas to save fishermen off the coast of Cape Elizabeth.

I have seen strangers line the streets of Dover-Foxcroft to welcome the remains of a World War II veteran home at last, and I know Maine National Guardsmen have been training in the freezing cold in Gilead alongside soldiers from Montenegro.

I have seen business owners line their windows with paper hearts to carry on the legacy of a man who quietly spread a contagion of kindness in Portland.

I have seen fans come together to cheer a new soccer team with great pride and excitement in their hearts of pine.

And, I have seen new Mainers build their lives here in our beloved state, finding a good home among loving and welcoming people.

It is the people of Maine who reaffirm my faith every day that the bonds we share will not be easily dissolved. That our democracy, defended by Maine people regardless of their politics, their power, or their possessions, will not be easily discarded.

And I will tell you this: As your governor, I will defend you. I will defend our Constitution – a Constitution written by immigrants – and I will defend our democracy. With everything I have.

Fifty years ago, farmers gathered in Mars Hill eager to be the very first of millions to celebrate this country and welcome a new dawn in the history of America.

One man wrote to the people of the future, "We of 1976 have faith that you will be there, as our fellow Americans of 1876 and 1776 had faith that we would be here. We now pass that faith on to you."

I accept.

Fifty years hence, I hope that better minds will have eliminated the scourge of cancer; that they will have explored the depths of the oceans for untold nutrients; that they will have found a way to preserve the air we breathe and the planet we were born to; that Artificial Intelligence will be commonplace but will never replace the human touch or the human heart; and that peace-seeking peoples will rule the nations.

More importantly, when the people of 2076 look back on us, I hope they see that we were a beacon of hope in dangerous times. That we stood side by side in moments of incredible joy and immense sorrow, sharing both gratitude and grief as one; that we refused to give in to a national drumbeat of division, doubt, and dread, that we stood tall and defended democracy; that we worked together for the lasting benefit of all.

From Bunker Hill to Little Round Top to Mars Hill to Capitol Hill and beyond, Maine people have climbed great heights to fight for democracy and to plant the flag of liberty.

Today whistles are sounding, alarms are ringing, calling once again for conscience, for common sense and for courage, calling for all of us to stand up, again, to defend the Constitution and to preserve the safety and security of our people.

We have the mountains of Maine at our backs, our ridgeline of courage, a spine of granite. And like our noble champions throughout history, we will "lead with our hearts."

We are the people of Maine.

To the Honorable Members of the Legislature, it has been a privilege to serve with you. You are an incredible array of public servants, always risking the friction and the controversy that comes with public affairs with a dedication to public duty.

To my staff and cabinet, I thank you for serving the people of Maine with hope, intelligence and compassion.

To my family, I would not be here tonight without you, I love you.

STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS

SELECTED ADDRESSES TO THE LEGISLATURE

And, to the people of Maine, It has been the greatest honor of my life to serve as your governor these past seven years.

From the bottom of my heart, I thank you.