

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

The following document is provided by the
LAW AND LEGISLATIVE DIGITAL LIBRARY
at the Maine State Law and Legislative Reference Library
<http://legislature.maine.gov/lawlib>



Reproduced from scanned originals with text recognition applied
(searchable text may contain some errors and/or omissions)

ACTS AND RESOLVES

AS PASSED BY THE

One Hundred and Third Legislature

OF THE

STATE OF MAINE

Published by the Director of Legislative Research in accordance with
the Revised Statutes of 1964, Title 3, Section 164, Subsection 6.

KENNEBEC JOURNAL

AUGUSTA, MAINE

1967

Inaugural Address
of
Governor Kenneth M. Curtis
to the
One Hundred and Third Legislature
January 5, 1967

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker and Members of the 103rd Legislature:

We live in an age of paradox.

Affluence and poverty are both on the march throughout the world.

Challenge and opportunity abound—but only for some.

The wonders of science thrust men toward the stars—while the shackles of poverty still sink men into despair.

The technological revolution has wrought great change in our way of life, and most of mankind is struggling to understand and to cope with that change.

Here in Maine we have a unique opportunity to enjoy the benefits of modern technology without suffering many of the disadvantages of modern civilization.

We can and must have good schools for our children, good jobs for our men and women, good homes for our families, and an economic climate that allows our young people to stay in Maine.

Most importantly, we in Maine have the rare opportunity to reach these goals without creating dirty cities, dirty air, and overcrowded slums.

During the past four years I have travelled to every corner of every county in this State. Everywhere I encountered the same conflicting attitudes. I found a genuine appreciation of our Maine way of life; but, at the same time, I found a great concern over the lack of opportunity that seems to go with that way of life.

But this need not be so.

And it falls to us, the elected representatives of the people of Maine, to do something about it.

We cannot remake Maine in two years, even if we wanted to. But we can select the long-range objectives toward which our State should be moving. We can point the way toward those objectives, and we must take the first few steps in what will be a long, difficult journey to reach those objectives.

As we commence our work we must understand the role of government in our lives.

Few will deny that our State government has a proper and vital role to play in the development of our resources—human and natural. Fewer still will assert that government can do the job by itself.

What we agree upon is that government must point the way and create the climate in which our great free enterprise system can prosper. Government must also at times act to prevent abuse or exploitation and to see that our development is balanced.

In applying these general principles to specific legislation, we will at times disagree. This is so because under our democratic system some conflict between the executive and the legislative branches of government is inevitable.

We need not apologize for or shrink from such disagreements. Our competitive political system is the basis of our democracy. Controlled competition can bring out the best in all of us.

Let us keep such differences in proper perspective, remembering that we all seek the same goals. We must trust in the integrity and responsibility of all men. We must never compromise the good of our State or our people in our reluctance to admit that we have been wrong or that someone else has presented a better solution. The democratic ideals and desire to render a public service, which we share, far outweigh any philosophical differences that may exist among us. I know that we can and will work together for the benefit of the people of Maine.

Next week, in my budget message, I will set forth in detail the program which I recommend for your consideration. Today, it is my purpose to touch upon the highlights of that program and to describe it only in brief outline.

EDUCATION

The greatest challenge facing us today is the need to expand and improve Maine's educational system. This is so for two reasons: first, because in our technological society progress of any kind — whether it be economic, social, or spiritual — requires high quality education for all. And second, because we in Maine have lagged so far behind in educational development in past years that we now have a long, long way to go just to catch up with the rest of the country.

I cannot overemphasize my conviction that education is the keystone in the arch of all progress, and requires our maximum attention and effort.

Our long-range objective must be free education beyond high school for every Maine boy and girl who has the desire and talent to use this education. We will not achieve this objective during my administration. Nevertheless, it is the objective toward which we must begin to move. It will be up to this Legislature to build the foundation for that move.

The Advisory Commission on Higher Education has rendered a detailed, provocative report charting what it believes our State's course should be in the coming years. These recommendations are of such importance to our future that I believe we should proceed with dispatch, but also with prudence, in their implementation.

The Commission will make certain recommendations concerning the methods by which implementation of its proposals can begin in this Legislature. I urge you to give these recommendations your earnest consideration. I would hope that sufficient progress can be made so that I will be able to present to the 104th Legislature a detailed legislative program to carry out those aspects of the Commission's recommendations which seem desirable.

To the 103rd Legislature, I recommend the allocation of substantial new funds to education for a variety of purposes:

— to expand faculties, equipment and programs in our Vocational Training Institutes and Practical Nursing Schools;

— for the State Colleges and the Maine Maritime Academy;

— for the University of Maine, partly to implement a long overdue salary increase.

I recommend that we fulfill the commitment of the 102nd Legislature under the basic school subsidy program. This will result in a substantial increase over our present state aid to cities and towns.

In addition, I recommend the approval of substantial building construction at our State Colleges, the University of Maine, Maine Maritime Academy, and for our Vocational Training Institutes.

We must intensify the movement to consolidate small school systems until every child in Maine has the opportunity to attend a high school large enough to provide adequate programs. To do this, however, we may need to develop a new formula for state subsidy payments.

We must find ways to reduce our school dropout rate.

In conjunction with the expansion of our vocational education program, I recommend a state-wide survey of occupational needs, so that our training programs can be closely tied to our industrial requirements. Provision should be made for periodic updating of such a survey, and for the creation of a Vocational Education Advisory Board, with representation from a cross section of Maine employers, labor organizations and educators to assist in the formulation of long-range policy in this field.

ECONOMIC AND NATURAL RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

For far too long, we have considered economic development and natural resource development separately, often as conflicting objectives. To emphasize my belief that this can no longer be the case, I will discuss them here under one heading.

The truth is that the one cannot survive without the other. In order to truly prosper, man needs both bread and beauty — both challenge and serenity. In simple terms, we can no longer afford an obsolete philosophy that insists we choose between “payrolls or pickerel” — we must have both.

I propose a major internal reorganization of the Department of Economic Development, designed to improve and strengthen it. As part of this reorganization I recommend the transfer of the Maine Industrial Building Authority and the Maine Recreation Authority to DED as a new Division of Economic Assistance. Our State effort must be redesigned to provide a maximum of technical assistance to existing industry and to the many fine local development agencies existing in virtually every city and town in Maine.

The lack of a coordinated transportation policy has for years hampered our economic development, particularly in view of the importance of tourism to our economy. To meet this need I propose the creation of a Department of Transportation, with separate Bureaus of Ground Transportation, Aviation, and Marine Transportation. The Maine Aeronautics Commission and the Maine Port Authority should be transferred to this Department.

Over the past century, Americans watched the spoliation of our rivers and lakes with indifference. Decades too late, we wake up to the problem, and we are now faced with a staggering backlog of needs in this area. We cannot let the same thing happen to our air.

Therefore, I propose the creation of an Environmental Improvement Administration, with a Division of Air Pollution Control and a separate Division of Water Pollution Control, to which we would transfer the present Water Improvement Commission.

The Executive Department must provide leadership in mobilizing all the talents and resources existing in our state departments. To do this, I intend to establish a cabinet level staff of department heads who will aid in this effort to broaden and strengthen our economic development programs.

I will recommend substantial capital investments for airport construction and improvement.

There remains great untapped wealth in our forests, and our agricultural potential offers limitless opportunities. I propose the continued investment of State funds in Farmers Home Administration mortgages to keep our money working in Maine, and an extension of the State's credit to assist in the financing of agricultural equipment and projects. We can do much to assure our future and preserve our heritage in these areas.

The same is true of our vast unharvested ocean resources. I also propose a bond issue for the acquisition of shoreline and other land for park and recreation area expansion.

We must continually strive to find ways to reduce our abnormally high power rates, which have so greatly restricted the development of our industrial potential and have burdened Maine consumers. The Dickey power project deserves our continued attention and support. The recommendations of the Special Legislative Power Study Committee should be given the most careful consideration.

We should revise our consumer credit laws to provide for full and meaningful disclosure of interest rates and credit charges, effective regulation of small loan companies, and protection of consumers against excessive finance charges and unfair and deceptive lending practices.

The time is also at hand when we must eliminate price controls on milk.

WELFARE AND LABOR

No resource is as valuable or meaningful to any state as its people. We know that the image of the Maine worker — dedicated, hard-working, intelligent, and loyal — is by and large a true one. Prosperity is a meaningless word if it is not shared by all segments of society. We must be ever alert to see that our working men and women share equitably in the benefits of our economic progress.

In this field I recommend the establishment of a state minimum wage equal to the federal minimum wage, to be automatically adjusted when the federal minimum wage is changed.

I also recommend revision of the Maine Employment Security Act and the Workmen's Compensation Act. Most importantly, we must create job opportunities with wages sufficient to meet today's cost of living.

While we show our concern for working people, we must also demonstrate our compassion for our senior citizens and for other less fortunate persons who may be victims of poverty, disease, or other physical or emotional defects.

I recommend that recipients of Old Age Assistance from the State Department of Health and Welfare be allowed to earn a reasonable income, without a corresponding reduction in their benefits. Today, if a recipient of Old Age Assistance in Maine takes it upon himself to earn money, his benefits under Old Age Assistance are reduced by the amount that he earns. As a result of this practice, elderly citizens are actively discouraged from continuing as productive members of society.

In addition, the practice of reducing Old Age Assistance whenever social security benefits are raised should be stopped immediately. Under the present system, senior citizens never see the increase.

The administration of welfare funds should be placed entirely in the hands of those people trained in handling the affairs of the needy. To do this, I urge that administration and financing for welfare programs be shifted from local control and responsibility to the State Department of Health and Welfare as rapidly as possible. This will increase the level of federal assistance to our welfare programs.

We must also provide for expanded professional services and support for self-government for Indians on reservations. I further recommend that Indian representatives to the Legislature be granted full privileges to speak on all legislation on the floor of the House, and that they be granted salary and expense allowances equal to that of other representatives.

STATE GOVERNMENT

There are other areas of government that must be improved.

In the next few weeks I will make specific proposals to consolidate our efforts in acquiring research data and necessary statistical information. This consolidation will also result in better coordination between state departments, and identify weaknesses in our organizational structure.

Of equal importance is the readjustment that must take place in the administration of justice, the structure of the executive department, and the responsibilities of the various state departments.

Briefly, these adjustments include establishment of a District Attorney system to match our District Court network, election of a Lieutenant Governor, abolition of the Executive Council, appointment by the Governor of the Secretary of State, the Attorney General, and the State Treasurer, and the realignment of responsibilities in several key departments in order to better meet the needs of the State of Maine.

FINANCING

Next week I will present to the Legislature and the people of Maine my proposals for financing State Government for the next biennium. With the assistance of professional advisors, and through consultation with department heads, I have developed a meaningful budget, with supplemental projects, that will not require any new major taxes.

There will be no need for an increase in the present 4% sales tax, nor will it be necessary to institute a state income tax.

To make substantial progress within the framework of our present tax structure, we must accept the principle of state bonding of most capital construction. This is a prudent fiscal course. It is established practice in private industry. It is done by other states. We can and should demonstrate similar confidence in our future.

CHALLENGE AND RESPONSE

There is a call for change that can be heard throughout Maine today. It touches every section of the community. We will meet this call with vision and courage.

Franklin D. Roosevelt said that —

The test of progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much, it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.

There are too many Maine people today who have too little.

If we are to play useful roles we must provide them with the opportunity to share fully in our good Maine way of life.

An inaugural is a time of renewal in our democratic system, heralding the start of a new term in the life of our state. It is a moment when we pause to assess the events of the past years, and to chart our course for the coming years.

For me, it is a time of sober reflection, of humble realization of the tasks ahead. Great as these tasks will be, I look forward to the future with determination and confidence. For, I know that with God's help and the support of the people of Maine, we can demonstrate anew the validity of Thomas Jefferson's observation that —

. . . the care of human life and happiness is the first and only legitimate object of good government.

Kenneth M. Curtis
Governor of Maine