

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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OF THE

STATE OF MAINE

AS PASSED BY THE

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STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS

OF

GOVERNOR JOHN R. McKERNAN, JR.

January 26, 1989

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, Members of the 114th Maine Legislature, and Fellow Citizens of Maine:

This is my second State of the State address, and as I prepared it, I found myself looking forward to delivering it. Because while tonight offers an opportunity to detail our administration's budget and legislative package, it also provides a chance for all of us to pause for a half hour or so to take stock and discuss our common goals. For me, this State of the State address is a particularly important one, because it marks the midpoint of my administration and offers a special chance to assess just how far we've come and how much further we must go to make Maine a state of opportunity and promise for all of our people.

Thanks to the cooperation and vision and commitment of many of you in this Legislature, we've made progress towards that shared goal. In many areas, it has been tremendous progress.

Maine is blessed in that ours is not a state where partisanship is more important than principles, where political in-fighting makes the good and true outcome impossible.

Maine people -- those of us here in this chamber and those of you listening or watching at home -- believe in certain fundamental truths: that family and friends matter more than objects or ambitions; that the environment is a treasure to be held in safe keeping; that we have a responsibility to look out for our neighbors, and a duty to contribute to our communities.

Those of us in this Chamber tonight may differ from time to time on a great many issues, but not on those. And it is those shared values that have allowed us, in the past two years, to work together -- Republicans and Democrats -- to build a better Maine.

And after two years, it is a better Maine.

It is a Maine where prosperity has finally stretched beyond our southern counties and erased the line that once divided us into the two Maines. Who would have thought five years ago that in 1988 the fastest job growth would be seen not in York and Cumberland and Androscoggin Counties, but in Sagadahoc, Lincoln, Franklin and Washington?

It is a Maine where -- thanks to comprehensive, bipartisan legislation -- our communities have the tools they need to plan for and manage growth so that they can retain those things that are of greatest value to them -- open spaces, access to the water and woods, affordable housing, a sense of community.

It is a Maine where those who have not been blessed with the things so many of us have been blessed with -- a supportive family, a complete education or even just a lucky break or two -- can have a second chance; can find through A.S.P.I.R.E. or a special job training or education program the skills they need to build a better life.

Since 1987, 4,100 Maine people have been trained and placed in jobs through our expanded job training programs. The annual salaries of those workers have added over \$47 million to Maine's economy. But it is not the economic impact of those jobs that is of greatest importance, it is the difference those programs have had on the lives of 4,100 Maine people and their families; on the future of a person like twenty-one-year-old Roy Hatch, who made \$5.34 at Belfast's Penobscot Poultry before the plant closed, and who now, thanks to the State's Rapid Employment and Training Initiative and a state partnership with Bath Iron Works, is a trained welder making \$9.35 an hour.

And it is a Maine that, perhaps most importantly, has made a strong and lasting commitment to its children. A Maine that has increased fortyfold its spending on child care and has increased -- more than nearly any other state -- its support to education. It is a Maine that believes that an investment in a child is a sound investment in the future.

As we end this decade and look towards a new century, Maine stands at a unique and proud place in its history. Not since the golden era of lumber and ships has Maine's promise and potential seemed so bright. And never has our responsibility to secure that promise for our children and their children been so great.

One hundred and thirty years ago, in the midst of Maine's first "golden era," Henry David Thoreau made one of his historic trips to the Maine woods. When he got to my hometown he wrote: "There stands the city of Bangor, the principal lumber depot on this continent, like a star on the edge of night, already overflowing with the luxuries and refinement of Europe, and sending its vessels to Spain, to England, and to the West Indies for its groceries."

During that proud era, Maine was a merchant to the world, selling lumber, granite, and lime to customers around the world. But when that era was over, when the age of sail gave way to steel and steam, when many of our greatest resources were depleted, Maine's bright promise dimmed. Thoreau would not have recognized Maine at the turn of this century. "White pine, spruce, salmon, ice, and men," Robert P. T. Coffin wrote of that period, "the bumper harvests have all gone."

I don't mean for that short history lesson to suggest that our current prosperity is a house of cards. Clearly, it is not. Maine's present economy is a diverse and strong one. But Maine's history does, I think, help remind us of two very important truths we can never afford to forget.

The first is that, in times of prosperity and strength, we must look to the future and invest in it.

The second is that we cannot afford to squander any of our resources -- whether we are talking about our children, our workers, or our environment.

We have heeded those lessons during the last two years. We have set priorities and focused our resources and attention on those areas that could help secure for the entire state economic health and individual promise.

Recognizing that roads are the arteries that pump economic vitality to our communities, we began an ambitious twenty-year highway improvement program that will improve roads and bridges all across the State.

Recognizing that in a rapidly changing economy and increasingly complex world, a high school diploma is no longer adequate preparation for the majority of new jobs, Maine has, for the past two years, led the nation in percentage increases in funding to higher education, and we have created a statewide telecommunications system that this fall will enable us to bring the university to Allagash, North Haven, Guilford, and twenty other small towns.

Recognizing that a history of inadequate funding left the State unable to meet properly its critical responsibilities to the mentally ill, we made a major commitment to our mental health institutions, a commitment that, in the coming biennium, will infuse some \$20.5 million more into those institutions and community-based care.

We increased funding to the Department of Environmental Protection to ensure that its mandate could be properly and efficiently carried out.

And recognizing that Maine's workers' compensation system was a major detriment to job creation and economic growth, we reached bipartisan support on major reforms to the system.

Much has been accomplished in the past two years -- both here in Augusta and all across Maine. But there is more to be done if we are to ensure that Maine's prosperity continues, that all of our citizens benefit from the economic growth, and that -- as this State continues to change -- we do not lose the very things that make Maine so special.

That is why I am proposing a budget and legislative package that, one, continues our commitment to making major investments in Maine, her people, and her future; and, two, pays special attention to saving and enhancing Maine's unique quality of life.

The \$3.2 billion budget I am proposing for the 1990-1991 biennium includes \$127 million in spending for new or expanded programs. Legislators have already received copies of the budget documents. Tonight, you will also receive a detailed summary of the material they contain. If you'll promise to read it, I'll promise to keep my explanation of the package brief.

Rather than cover the entire package, I want to focus on several priority areas.

The first is the investments we are making in Maine people, from pre-schoolers to the elderly.

A couple of months ago, Bob Keeshan -- better known as Captain Kangaroo -- spoke in Augusta. He said something that needs to be repeated. He called childhood a garden "where we plant the seeds of love and the seeds of hate, the seeds of happiness and the seeds of misery; a garden whose harvest we all share, for good or evil." He made the case for more early education and child care programs that give our children a solid foundation upon which to grow and learn. Tonight, I want to make that same case. Our budget includes over \$2.5 million in new and expanded programs to ensure that our youngest children, particularly those who are at risk, are cared for and nurtured.

The budget also includes \$3 million in new funding for programs aimed at older children who are at risk. In an imperfect world, it is not always possible to identify and treat -- before it is too late -- the problems of a troubled child such as Scott James. But the additional funding in this biennium's budget will allow for more casework for troubled youth, more referral options, better foster care and juvenile justice systems, and expanded efforts at parent-teen communications.

For all of our children, we must continue our commitment to improving the quality of our education system. This past year, Maine had the largest percentage increase in state support to local schools of any state in the nation. But there is still work to do. We must continue to focus on quality, and the budget includes nearly \$4 million in grant programs to local units to encourage quality and innovation in our classrooms.

But we must also focus on something even more basic -- the quantity of time our children spend in school. Maine has the second shortest school year in the nation. It will cost us \$4 million for every additional day we add. It's time we made that investment. Simply put: it's time for more time in the classroom.

We must continue our commitment to improving the public university system of this State. The budget includes \$25 million to do that, and it also includes \$7 million to make higher education financially accessible for every person in this State.

Maine, through the Student Incentive Scholarship Program is able to offer grants to only one half of those who qualify; and as a father of a son about to enter college, I know the difficulty parents have in meeting the growing costs of post-secondary education. Our budget seeks to more than double our student aid grants by 1991 and to offer them to nearly all eligible applicants.

That's the first important step in making higher education more affordable and more accessible to our students; there are other steps we must also take. We are proposing to consolidate all of our student aid programs within one Higher Education Authority that will offer "one-stop shopping" to students, parents, and guidance counselors seeking financial aid assistance and information. Within that Authority, we intend to create a loan program of last resort in order to make it crystal clear to everyone in this State that, as far as this administration is concerned, no eligible Maine student is going to be denied access to higher education solely due to an inability to pay.

In making such a guarantee, we send a clear message that this State values education and believes in the promise and potential of every one of our children.

Tonight, I want to make sure that the teachers of this State receive a similar message about the tremendous importance of their work. Included in this budget is a half million dollars to provide financial assistance to public school teachers and administrators pursuing advanced degrees. If we are serious about providing professional advancement opportunities for our educators; if we are serious about encouraging teachers to challenge themselves and their students, we must assist them in those efforts.

Accessibility and affordability are issues confronting our health care system as well. Our budget includes \$5.3 million to help provide greater access and quality care to our most vulnerable citizens.

It includes additional funding for AIDS treatment, training, and education; more dollars for congregate services to the elderly to allow them to remain in their homes and communities for as long as possible; strengthened maternal and child health services; and funding to address the health care worker shortage through an expansion of the Health Occupation Training Program created during the last session.

But we need to do more. The cost of health care is beyond the means of too many Maine citizens and is becoming one of this state's most vexing problems. But as H. L. Mencken once wrote: "Every complex problem has a simple solution, and it is usually wrong." Simply throwing taxpayer dollars at this problem will not make it go away. During this session, we must work together to ensure access to quality, affordable health care, and we must also address the underlying causes of the system's rising costs. We must look at a variety of issues -- tort reform, mandated insurance benefits, a lack of competition in the system -- and make some tough choices. Until we do that, our solutions will be band-aids, not the long-term care the system so badly needs.

All of the programs I have just outlined -- from education to health care -- continue our commitment to making Maine a state of opportunity and promise for all of our citizens.

But the commitments do not end there. Within State Government, we have vowed to deliver services as efficiently and effectively as possible and to ensure that past commitments are honored. This budget includes funding to staff new correctional facilities, and to complete a financial and administrative systems project that will bring State Government out of the technological dark ages, provide state employees with the tools they need to do their jobs, and allow us to conduct the State's business far more quickly and effectively. It includes increased funding for the Maine State Retirement System; General Fund dollars to support the work of the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife; and new staff and resources to ensure that the Department of Environmental Protection carries out its critical work.

This administration, through this budget, continues its commitment to strengthening Maine's quality of life.

"Change is certain," someone once said, "progress is not." Growth and prosperity have brought with them new opportunities for the people of Maine, but they have also brought new challenges. And in order to make sure that this changing State remains a safe, affordable, and beautiful place to live, we must take aggressive action in 1989.

We must take aggressive action to diffuse the threat of drug abuse and crime. The business of distributing illegal drugs in our State is conservatively estimated at \$100 million. Our budget includes funds to increase fivefold state support for the

Bureau of Intergovernmental Drug Enforcement. We're going to make it perfectly clear that drug dealers and users have no business, absolutely none, in this State.

We must take aggressive action to ensure that rising property values do not make something as basic as a decent, affordable place to live beyond the means of Maine people. Our budget includes \$5 million to help communities and individuals build homes that are within the financial reach of a young family dreaming of owning their first home.

We must take aggressive action to ensure that no person in this State is forced to sell his or her home because the burden of property taxes has become too great. Our budget includes new funding for the Family HomeSaver Program which, when combined with existing programs, brings to \$46 million the amount dedicated to lowering the property tax burden on individuals. Our Family HomeSaver Program will help make it possible for a lobsterman in Jonesport or an elderly widow in South Portland to continue to live in the house where he or she grew up, and not have to sell out to the highest bidder simply because they can no longer afford to pay taxes on property that has escalated dramatically in value.

In all, in the past two years, the State has approved in excess of \$50 million in new property tax relief to our communities and citizens. This budget continues that commitment by providing additional relief, and promises the potential of returning, each year, up to \$25 million more to municipalities by sharing future state surpluses.

Finally, we must take aggressive and decisive action in 1989 to save Maine from a future plagued by unmanageable waste and environmental degradation. More than ten years ago, Maine people had the vision to enact one of this nation's first bottle bills. Our roads and rivers are cleaner because of that act. But now, we must take that commitment to our environment one giant step further.

Our budget includes nearly \$3 million, a \$3 million down payment, to begin to implement a comprehensive solid waste management system that will provide our communities with the resources they need to handle waste on a regional basis and that will ask each of us to help save Maine's environment by recycling our trash.

Our goal is to reduce this State's waste stream by 25 percent by 1995. To prove my commitment to that goal, tomorrow morning I will sign an executive order requiring all state government agencies to begin recycling their office paper. And tonight, I am asking every person in this State to make a similar commitment. We have a responsibility to future generations to ensure that we do not trash this beautiful place. And as a sign of our shared commitment, I am going to ask all of you to help stop the waste and to start spreading the word with this new bumper sticker.

Thoreau described this State in the 1850's as being "like a star on the edge of night," shining brightly, burning with energy and strength and promise. Now, as we are about to enter the last decade of this century, the same can once again be said of this great State.

You may not know this, but at the top of the state seal, is the North Star, the polar star, the sailor's guide in conducting the ship to its destination. I would hope that that star and the motto beneath it -- Dirigo, "I lead" -- would serve as our symbol and our inspiration during this important session of the Legislature.

Maine has a long and proud tradition of innovation and resourcefulness, of charting its own course, and following its own star. Tonight, faced with both tremendous opportunities and challenges, I would ask all of you to recommit to that proud tradition, to work with us in finding creative, innovative, long-term responses to the issues that are before us. We need to look up again, look to the future, and, together, lead this State into a promising new decade and century.

I look forward to charting that course with all of you.

Thank you.