

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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STATE OF MAINE

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**STATE OF THE STATE ADDRESS
OF
GOVERNOR ANGUS S. KING, JR.
JANUARY 23, 2001**

Mr. Speaker, Mr. President, Mr. President Pro Tem, Mr. Chief Justice, Members of the 120th Legislature, Citizens of Maine,

In each of the past six years, I have come before you at this time to report on the State of the State, to take stock of where we are and, more importantly, where we want to be. I've talked about the ice storm and the economy, cigarettes and the economy, agriculture and the economy, education and the economy, and, last year, our friend Chuck Cianchette and the economy.

If there's a pattern here, I plead guilty--for my central guiding principal over the past six years has been that the support of a strong and vibrant free-enterprise economy is the most important thing any of us in this building can do for the people of Maine, no matter what our political or ideological goals.

As a direct result of the strength of the Maine economy, we have had the enviable task of coping with wave after wave of revenue surplus—funding long-deferred maintenance on our public infrastructure, cutting taxes by more than \$450 million, building up the Rainy Day Fund from \$6.4 million to \$143 million, embarking upon a visionary land conservation effort, making the largest two-year investment in our schools—both buildings and programs—in the history of the state, and undertaking an historic initiative -- linking our University and the private sector -- in research and development -- that will change the face of Maine.

But all of this progress came from the same place: the growing economy of Maine. Greater prosperity, more people making more money, and, yes, paying taxes is what underlies all the achievements I mentioned.

My commitment to better jobs, better pay, better benefits in Medway and Madison as well as Sanford and Scarborough has not and will not flag, for whatever we want to do for our people—whether in education, health care, domestic violence, environmental protection, or research and development—it all rests on jobs and economic growth. During the course of this legislative session and throughout the next two years, I will bend my energies to this task, of that, you should have no doubt.

Tonight, however, I want to talk about the economy through the lens of our children, and in the process focus on two basic ideas – community and

opportunity – and, if we can preserve the one and seize the other, we will shape a great future for Maine.

Before turning to community, however, let me at least outline some important initiatives I will bring before you this winter, without details tonight, but with much more discussion to come.

First, I will be offering a set of proposals to make private health insurance more affordable for individuals and small businesses, to contain health care costs, and to empower consumers through information and incentives so that they may play an increased role in determining their own health care future.

Next, we will continue the fight I declared here last year against “Public Enemy #1” by reaffirming zero tolerance towards domestic and sexual abuse. In the past year, a great deal of momentum has developed on this issue, and I welcome the opportunity to work with this Legislature and dedicated organizations across the state to continue the fight against this intolerable plague.

We will pursue policies that encourage and enable the development of affordable housing for all Maine people, and I urge every Maine community to make housing for its lower income families and elderly a moral and economic imperative. When it comes to housing, NIMBY has no place in Maine.

We will work together to increase the number of college graduates in Maine using earnings from the NEXTGEN college savings program and working with the newly created MELMAC education foundation to provide scholarship dollars to Maine students. This initiative, when coupled with the growing resources allocated to Research and Development proposed in my budget, give us a running start on the goal of “30 and 1,000”, 30% of Maine’s adults with college degrees and \$1,000 in R and D investment behind each Maine worker.

We will continue investments in our highways and bridges, as well as in air, rail, trail and marine, and we’ll do so while providing a sustainable funding plan that also results in reduced highway debt.

I have proposed a reliable source of tourism funding which will sustain and support one of our most important industries.

I will propose a pilot program to redefine forest management to focus on results instead of regulations.

We will work with Maine businesses on “Smart Production”, an initiative that will start industrial processes on a path toward zero environmental impact while simultaneously increasing our market competitiveness.

I will propose a “Smart Growth” package of initiatives that will preserve our neighborhoods, keep our communities livable, and strengthen the natural resource economy of our rural areas.

I will offer a bill to get mercury out of products in Maine and continue to work with our neighbors so that fish advisories in Maine will finally become a thing of the past.

And let’s finally get the State out of the retail liquor business and save \$5 million every year for the taxpayers.

I will offer a proposal to return order to the citizen initiative process and sanctity to our voting places by extending the existing restrictions on polling place politicking to those collecting signatures just as they now apply to those collecting votes.

I will propose some insurance against the next economic slow down by constitutionally protecting the Rainy Day Fund.

We will continue the battle begun last year to insure access to life-giving prescription drugs to our most vulnerable citizens. No one within the sound of my voice should doubt the determination of anyone in this room on this score.

Just last Friday, for example, one of the last acts of Secretary Donna Shalala was to grant Maine’s request to extend the Medicaid discount to prescription drugs to all Mainers who do not have drug insurance and who are at or below 300% of poverty. This means that beginning in July, 225,000 Maine people will pay 25% less for medically necessary drugs.

But now, and for the rest of the evening, I want to talk about kids—mine, yours, and all those in Maine. And, as I mentioned earlier, I want to do this in the context of preserving community and seizing opportunity.

Because even in a state renowned for its natural resources, our greatest treasures are not the mountains we ascend, the rivers we canoe, the oceans we sail or even the books we read. It’s the children we raise—they are the true measure of our worth, and how we prepare them for their own lives will be the best gauge of our success.

Look at what we’ve accomplished for our children in just the last few years:

Make no mistake, improving job options and opportunities for parents is one of the best things we can do for their kids. Since the winter of 1995, we have added over 67,000 net new jobs; that’s net new jobs—over and above the replacement of job losses in Wilton, Winslow, Westbrook, or anywhere else in Maine. If you do the math, that comes out to 255 new jobs a week, week in and week out for five years.

And, this fall, we posted the lowest unemployment rate since 1945.

Six years ago an overwhelmed child protective system in Maine received over 17,000 reports of possible child abuse or neglect; of these, the Department of Human Services was unable to investigate 2,700 cases, leaving the children and families represented by these cases at risk.

Today, with the support of the Legislature and a Herculean effort from the managers and front-line workers at the Department of Human Services, that backlog of almost 3,000 cases has been reduced to 203. That’s good news for the kids of Maine.

While it is always our first priority to reunite families, some times moving children into foster care is the only option – but this was never intended to be a long-term solution. And so, every year, we have kids who need a safe, stable home and prospective adoptive parents who want to build a family, but getting them together has been a cumbersome and lengthy process. So slow, in fact, that in all of 1994, there were only 66 completed adoptions for children in state custody.

Again, through additional resources and a total reorganization of our process, the number of adoptions completed by DHS in the year just past was 372, an amazing 5-fold increase, with 96 more awaiting court approval at year’s end. Believe me, that’s great news for those kids.

Two of the people who have helped make this happen, Pat Beaulieu, Adoption Supervisor from Lewiston, and Joy Pottle, Adoption Caseworker from Ellsworth, are with us tonight and I want to thank them.

For they have literally helped create new families in Maine. If there is a higher calling than finding a safe haven for a child, I have yet to see it. One of these new families is with us in the gallery tonight. Bill and Ellen County of Auburn are here with Billy, Rose, and Albert. Thank you Bill and Ellen and congratulations to one of Maine’s newest families.

And let’s talk about the health of our kids. Four years ago, under the leadership of the 118th Legislature, we expanded Medicaid and created Cub Care coverage for children of low-income working families in Maine. But passing the bill and setting up the

program was only the start. The folks at DHS then went to work to make it work, creating the nation's best outreach and sign-up process. While many states had long and complicated application forms stretching to ten pages or more, our folks got it all on one, easy-to-read piece of paper.

The result is that we now have the fourth highest rate of insured – that's insured, not uninsured – kids in the country, an astounding 94% of the children in Maine. Because of our success, we are one of only ten states slated to receive additional federal funds that other states failed to allocate. We will be working with you to make sure our kids benefit from this new money.

Also, in the area of children's mental health:

- Case management services to children have increased by 70% just last year;
- In-home supports have been expanded by 700% in the last two years;
- The numbers of children placed in out-of-state treatment has been reduced by 46% over the last two years; and
- We have developed, in partnership with the Judiciary and Corrections Department, an innovative drug court program that intensively treats kids with criminal and substance abuse problems.

Next, four years ago we made a difficult choice to raise the excise tax on cigarettes. Since that time, youth smoking in Maine has declined an amazing 27%. We still have too many kids smoking, though, and if we agree to push this tax up one more notch that figure will continue to fall and we'll be saving lives all over the state.

In education, the success stories continue. Just recently Maine was recognized as a leader in public K-12 education. We stand at the top of the nation in student readiness to enter school, student achievement, school climate, and in the efficiency with which we use our education dollars.

Our fourth and eighth graders are always among the top scorers in the country in math, science, reading and writing. We're consistently among the top states in high school graduation rates. And more of our children are going past high school. Enrollment in technical colleges, in the University System, and in community colleges has risen by more than 3,000 students during the past six years.

And, we're not done yet—our vision is that Maine people will be among the best educated in the world. We've adopted good policies and made

education a budget priority, but the biggest reason for the success so far is Maine's dedicated and experienced teachers and school leaders who are there for our kids every day. With us tonight, for example, is the 2001 Maine Teacher of the Year, Elaine Hendrickson, an English teacher at Skyway Middle School in Presque Isle, and her husband Eric, also a teacher. Thank you Elaine for all that you do.

All of this good progress was summed up the summer before last when the Children's Rights Council in Washington looked at these and a bunch of other factors and rated Maine as the number one state in the United States in which to raise a child.

But there are still problems, and some of them are very deep and go more to the way our society is evolving than the existence or effectiveness of any government program. And the solution to these problems must involve our best efforts here, but also must go considerably beyond what we can do with budgets and government programs.

And this has made me think about the way our society has changed in the last forty years or so—since most of us were kids—and how we really haven't taken full account of it. Go into any classroom in Maine and ask how many kids have both parents working, or have their single parent working, and about 90% of the hands will go up.

And compounding this challenge is the enormous new mobility of the American people—a change which has expanded options and opportunities for all of us, but which comes at an invisible but very real cost.

The result of all this is that too many of our kids are growing up without a net, and can miss the subtle—or in the case of my mom, not-so-subtle—messages, role models, support, encouragement, and general guidance coming from that most basic and important of all human institutions, the family. These messages either aren't there or must come from one beleaguered parent who has to carry the entire weight.

So what can we do? What must we do to take up the slack? Well, we have to move on all fronts, but in spite of everything we can and are doing here, government can't do it all.

For something has happened in our lifetimes that I don't think is healthy. We, all of us, have come to think that every problem must have a governmental solution; that Augusta or Washington, with just one or two new programs or a slightly bigger budget can make it all better. Where did the truckers come last year when the price of diesel shot up? It wasn't a refinery or an oil port, it was here, and they expected us to fix it.

And this relatively new expectation has allowed us in many cases to avoid personal responsibility, to offload the sometimes awkward or onerous responsibilities of citizenship to bureaucrats and politicians. But it will never work--society is just too big, too complicated, and the demands of community too personal.

For the heart of all this is community, which is really just another word for extended family: that complicated set of relationships and connections that bind us together, that allows us--and in some cases compels us--to know each other, to care about each other, to love each other. And in our rush into a new century, with its mobility and prosperity, its new options and constant change, it is community we are in danger of losing.

And if it's lost, all the taxes and government programs in the world won't bring it back.

If we lose our community, we lose our spirit, we lose our identity, we lose our soul, and we lose those things that make all else valuable.

You're not going to believe the timing of this, but let me read you an excerpt from an e-mail I got yesterday from an Air Force Sergeant who recently came to the DFAS Center at Limestone:

"The South will always be my home but I can tell you it's changed so much I don't want to raise my children there. You've managed to preserve something here in northern Maine that's very special. I don't know what you call that "something" but I sure knew it when I saw it. The community spirit and country flavor is how my home was 30 years ago. I want to give my kids the chance to grow up in a hometown like I did. This is the only place I found in the last 21 years of traveling around the world that comes close. I guess you can tell I've fallen in love with your Aroostook County. My family has, too. If you'll have us, we would like to stay for awhile."

Jack -- we'll have you, and you're certainly welcome to stay.

Five years ago, we began to work on this idea of preserving community through an unusual kind of government program called Communities for Children--one staff person, practically no budget, but a powerful idea--harness the creativity, energy, and effort that is already out there--from Eastport to Kittery and Bethel to Belfast--and be the catalyst for sharing experiences --both successes and failures--so each community doesn't have to reinvent the wheel, or the teen center, in this case.

The results have been wonderful. 220 towns are now involved. Each "partner community" creates a leadership council made up of caring residents that

assess the realities facing children and youth in their community. The council develops prevention programs and policies and tracks the results of their work. And they communicate with each other -- through Communities For Children -- about what works and what doesn't.

But there has to be a further step, over and above taxes and programs and budgets, even modest budgets like Communities for Children or big budgets like Medicaid. That step requires that citizens--you, me, our relatives, children, parents and colleagues-- get involved and commit ourselves and our resources to strengthening our communities and our kids, one by one by one.

In ancient Greece, Odysseus went off to war and asked his best friend, named Mentor, to raise his son, and a concept was born that has never been more important than today.

There are only 3,000 formal mentor relationships in Maine today, that's less than 2% of all school-aged youth. A very conservative estimate is that 15% of our children--30,000--need mentors to support their journey to caring, competent adulthood.

The Maine Mentoring Partnership, a public-private consortium, has put together a plan for helping communities overcome the lack of mentors and get us to 30,000 in just three short years.

This partnership has joined national and state partners to begin this critical work: General Colin Powell's America's Promise, our own Maine's Promise, Communities for Children, Maine's faith communities, and a new national partner, Communities in Schools. This summer will mark the Maine launch of a national model that links the volunteer resources of our faith communities with the school and community need for mentors. The model teaches local schools and faith communities how to work with each other in ways that honor the necessary boundaries between public education and church but will result over time in 10,000 new mentoring relationships--a huge chunk of that 30,000 goal.

With us tonight in the gallery are two mentors that I'd like to introduce to you. Charles Asbury moved to Maine from Texas after a career in financial investments. Some time ago when I met him in Rockland I told him that moving to Maine was the best decision he could have made. Charles wants us to know tonight that the second best decision was to become a Big Brother to Walter Hezik.

Waite Albro was a World War II pilot and is a mentor with Pathway Partners at Mt. Abram High School in Franklin County. His protégé, Paul Zucco, aspires to attend the U.S. Air Force Academy.

Waite and Charles, for an investment of a few hours per week you have changed Walter and Paul's lives forever.

Getting all the way to 30,000 will cost some money but, as government programs go, it's a bargain--\$250,000 a year. Some money will provide training and technical assistance to community mentoring programs. A portion will be grants to start or expand local mentoring efforts. The rest—which like they say on the TV ads is priceless—will come from all of us in the form of time and commitment.

For an investment of a few hours a year, you could change someone's life forever.

Other places to help are in the schools or at places like the Maine Youth Center, where things are looking up, by the way. While it's been a tough road and I'm not ready to declare victory, transformational changes are in the works and within two years, with committed leadership, real programs aimed at rehabilitation, not punishment, modern buildings, reinvigorated and committed staff and involvement from the community, including many in this room, we will have regional facilities--in South Portland and Charleston--of which we can finally be proud, not apologetic.

But over and above these new programs--and a considerable increase in financial resources--are the efforts of over 100 volunteers, who, every day, work with the kids, listen to them, sometimes cook for them, and act as mentors and guides through what must be one of life's hardest experiences. Their biggest accomplishment is that they care. Dan Reardon, Chairman of the Maine Youth Center Board of Visitors, personifies the type of commitment of which I speak. Dan's one of those weekend cooks I talked about and he's here with us tonight.

Dan, your extraordinary investment of time at the Maine Youth Center has changed the lives of a lot of troubled kids forever and I want to thank you for it.

Beyond these examples, there are dozens of other ways to help—volunteering in the schools, reading at your local library, getting involved with Scouts, coaching soccer, baseball, football, or hockey (as I look back, many of my most important mentors and role models were my coaches), or just helping out a tired parent in the neighborhood who might need a break.

For an investment of a few hours, you will change someone's life forever.

And so, is this all there is? If we are great parents and mentors, guides and friends, will our kids have what they need to flourish? They will certainly have a key piece of the puzzle, but in the world of the 21st

Century, they will need more, because we are entering a period of enormous change, change that will demand more from our kids than our times have demanded of us.

To adapt and prosper in these times, we must pass on to our children the best of our past – the benefits of community -- but also provide them with the stuff of opportunity – and thereby the ability to face an uncertain future with confidence and courage.

For we live in a world of information and knowledge, of technology and tools--and access to these tools and comfort in their use is what now defines opportunity and a shot at the good life, and it's to that I want to turn.

But first, I have to return to the Maine economy for a couple of minutes. As I mentioned, by many measures—new jobs, unemployment rate, income growth-- we're doing well, and over the last several years we've been ahead of the national average in a couple of these categories. But the stubborn truth is that we're still a poor state--and those are hard words for any Governor to utter--not poor in natural resources or quality of our people, to be sure, but poor in money—37th in the country in per capita income, to be exact.

That means almost three quarters of the states are ahead of us. And except for a brief period in the late eighties—when we were in a condo-based building boom—that's where we've been as long as anyone can remember.

Now the reasons for this are many and varied—and relate to everything from geography and climate to our economic and social history. And try as we might, there is no simple, single solution; the fact is that we have to do lots of things at once—international trade, research and development, improved educational standards, more kids (and grown-ups) in college and technical college; efficient and timely regulation, maintaining our unique quality of life, lighter taxes, competitive financing--you name it.

But you know what? Everyone else is doing the same things. When I go to meetings with the other Governors, it's all about Learning Results, distance education, college scholarships, state guarantee authorities, telecommunications infrastructure, and cutting taxes. Which means that it's awfully hard to catch up—because it's all relative. If we have a great year and personal income grows by 5%, but so does the rest of the country, we don't gain an inch. And if the rest of the country grows by 5.1%, we lose ground, even in a good year.

So what do we do? (Boy, I've thought a lot about this over the last six years). Quitting isn't an option—we have to do all those things I mentioned—and a lot

more besides--just to stay in the game; failure to do so is giving up on any future for our kids, leaving as our only growth industry U-hauls headed south with the best and the brightest from the towns and cities of Maine.

I do not want to be the Governor of a state who's leading export is its kids.

So we have to keep at it on all fronts, but we also have to look for an edge, a niche, a calling card, an ace in the hole that will put us in a special position to take advantage of the challenges and opportunities of the new century. We have to figure out what this new century will look like in five, ten, or twenty years—where the jobs, especially the high-paying jobs, will be and what we can do now to be sure we get our fair share, and more.

Here's one idea—you may have heard me mention it before. How about being the most technologically capable society on earth?

Is there any question that this is where the world is headed? As of right now according to a recent survey conducted by Dr. Charles Colgan, an incredible 65% of the jobs in Maine involve some computer use every day; in Cumberland County, the figure is 76 %. Virtually every business, from sawmills to software, from silicon chips to the good old potato variety, involves computers. And the Internet—which didn't even exist ten years ago—is driving change in communication, entertainment, economics, and the very fabric of our life at an absolutely unprecedented rate. And, this is no exaggeration—the Internet has entered our work and daily lives faster than any technology – telegraph, radio, TV, you name it -- in the history of the world.

Whether we love it or fear it, the future is digital. And, to quote my friend Mike Leavitt, the Governor of Utah, “those individuals and societies who resist this reality will fail; those which accept it will survive, and those which embrace it will flourish.”

And I desperately want Maine to flourish.

If you think about it, the fundamental job of public education is to prepare our children for the future. Today's kindergarten students will graduate in 2013. They must prosper in the workplace of 2020, 2030 and 2040. I said a moment ago that 65% of Maine workers already use a computer every day on the job. Guess how many Maine students have access right now to a computer in their classroom to learn with every day? It's not half, it's not even 10%, it's 2%. That's right, 2%. Now let me get this straight – 2% of our kids use computers every day in school and when they get out and go to work, 70% will be using them. What's wrong with this picture?

Luck and circumstances have put before us this winter an historic choice, a choice that I believe will profoundly affect the future of Maine and her people. The choice is between merely keeping up and leapfrogging, being first, setting the standard, in short, leading.

What I am talking about, of course, is equipping every middle school student and teacher in Maine; rich, poor, north, south, east, west, urban, rural, every student, with the defining tool of the 21st Century, a digital device that more than any other single thing we can do holds the key to those good jobs.

When I first raised this idea in the form of laptops for 7th graders last winter it got quite a response from Maine people.

One response, in particular, from a Maine citizen saddened me: “Dear Governor, we're a poor state; let somebody else lead”. To that one I replied, “that's exactly the point, and we'll stay poor unless we lead”.

Perhaps the most poignant was a letter to one of you from a selectman in a small town: “If the Governor wants to give something useful to the kids in my town, he should make it a chain saw.”

But you know, he got the basic idea—because what we're talking about here is nothing more than a tool, as crucial to the economy of the future as a chainsaw is to a woodcutter today. But the income from a tool like a chainsaw tops out at about ten bucks an hour, while the one I suggest has no upper limit.

One of the biggest responses was, “Governor, I know we need to do something about the future, but can this really work?”

Just ask people in SAD 4 in the Guilford area. Last year, they decided on their own to take a risk, to seize the future—to be first—and to make a name for themselves as a community that “gets it” and is ahead of the curve. And the biggest supporter was Guilford's largest employer, Guilford of Maine, who saw that the work of the future is going to need these tools and these skills. Up in Guilford, they armed every 8th grader with a laptop and watched the excitement and the learning take off. Crystal Priest, the technology teacher for Piscataquis Middle School, and Greg Bellemare, the Principal, are in the gallery tonight. And by the way, Crystal could tell you that during this time only one kid has dropped a computer!

To those who doubt the power of this idea, I say, just go to Guilford.

Last year the Legislature took this proposal and gave it to a remarkable task force—jointly appointed and including educators, legislators, and citizens from across Maine. Among its membership were supporters

and skeptics, some committed to technology, some not so sure.

And a wonderful thing happened.

After nine meetings, and more than 50 hours of deliberation, long discussions and difficult decisions, they came together on a practical plan that will work for Maine, one that meets many of the objections raised last winter and one that, yes, considerably improves my original proposal. Instead of full-blown laptops, we're talking less expensive and less breakable machines that have some stand-alone computing capacity, but have a lot more memory and capacity on the school-based network. Instead of the kids owning them, they'd be owned by the school, which would make the decisions about when and under what circumstances they could go home.

The plan provides a strong training component to make sure our teachers know how to get the most out of this technology. Instead of every grade, 7 to 12, the plan, in its first phase, at least, would cover only 7th and 8th grades, the top two years of middle school.

But the core of the idea is still there—a one-time endowment to support one-to-one computer access, on every desk, every day.

Let me take you back 200 years or so to a moment similar to this one, when somebody came up with a new learning technology—it could do word processing, drawing, math; a great breakthrough; it's called a pencil. Now imagine somebody suggesting that the way to take advantage of this new tool is to have, in every school, a pencil lab! And the wealthier districts might even have one or two pencils in every classroom for the kids to share.

Well, the computer is nothing more than a super pencil and a super book rolled into one: a learning tool that can enable us to write, figure, and draw, but it's so much more, for the Internet is the richest repository of information ever assembled on the planet. The works of Shakespeare are there, the entire Encyclopedia Britannica is there, live cameras at a waterhole in Kenya are there and more and more content, millions of pages, is being added daily.

Now, as a parent with a ten year old who occasionally uses the Internet, I'm also very aware that some of that content isn't so hot. That's why, as part of the plan, access to the Internet will be through the Maine School and Library Network, which has filters to protect our kids from the bad stuff.

We can't possibly know where the kids will take the technology, but we do know that wherever this has been tried—from Australia to Georgia to Guilford, Maine, the results have been dramatic. Not little, incremental steps, but big, transformational ones.

Remember the term I used a little while ago, “leap-frogging”? This is it.

And remember I said a few minutes ago that we had an historic decision? We do, but it's not whether these devices will make their way onto every school desktop in Maine. I haven't the slightest doubt that five to ten years from now, probably sooner, they'll be on every school desk in America. (While we were debating last winter, for example, the New York City school board decided to go ahead with a similar plan, only they are starting with a computer for every fourth grader, making me look kind of moderate).

No, the question isn't whether, it's when. More bluntly, the question is whether we'll be first, or thirty-seventh, and if that number rings a bell, it should.

The other question is who in Maine gets there first. Under the Task Force's plan, this is an equity tool--everybody gets in at the same time and the students I visited last summer in Alexander -- up in Washington County -- will have the same edge on the rest of the world as those in Falmouth or Freeport. Say no and it will still happen, but guess who will, by and large, get there last. And the two Maine's will tragically grow further and further apart.

This can be our niche, our comparative advantage, our calling card. This will put us on the technology map, and it will signal to the world that we intend to invest boldly in the future of our children.

Build the most technologically savvy workers in the world, and the jobs will come; oh yes, the high-paying jobs will surely come.

Opportunity, equity; and there's one other piece of this plan that can pay off for us, and it's already started happening. In the global competition to attract and hold talent--remember, the whole idea is to keep our kids here--it can't be a bad thing for Maine to be known as a hot place, a place that gets it, and is even ahead of the curve.

But we have to do it now; the advantage in all of this is in getting there first; everyone will know the first state to take this step; no one will know who's second, or 37th.

I want to leave you with the thoughts of two of my favorite philosophers, Charles Darwin and Wayne Gretzky--and I defy you to figure out where I'm going with this.

Darwin's most famous line, of course, is “the survival of the fittest” and for most of my life I thought “the fittest” meant the biggest, the strongest, the toughest. But a friend pointed out a couple of years ago that I was wrong--if that were the case, the dinosaurs would still be in charge--and that what

Darwin actually said was that the fittest--the survivors--would be those organisms, individuals, or societies most adaptable to change. And my friends, we are up to our eyeballs in change.

Gretzky is the greatest scorer in the history of the National Hockey League; a guy many consider the greatest player of all time. And someone once asked him the secret of his success--how he scored so many goals and seemed so far ahead of everyone else. "Its easy," he replied, "I skate to where the puck is going to be; everybody else skates to where it is." What a profound observation, "I skate to where the puck is going to be; everybody else skates to where it is."

And so, that's where we are tonight; we know where the puck is going to be; the question is whether we'll have the courage, the imagination, and the will to go for it.

I deeply and passionately hope that we do.

Tonight, I have talked in different ways about change. Our changing economy, our changing families, our changing communities, our changing education, our changing opportunities. The essence of our responsibility as stewards of our environment, community, children, and the future, is to anticipate change, and to respond to inevitable change in ways that give our kids a fighting chance to master that future.

We must nurture and bring the best of our past and present—our caring, our community, our unparalleled quality of life—forward with us. But at the same time, we must be prepared to seize the best and most promising of the future to create new opportunities and new prosperity. The purposes expressed in Maine's two state slogans are not separate, but one: simultaneously to keep life the way it should be, and to lead.

Decades from now, in 2040 or 2050, today's kindergarten students will sit in this place and grapple with the challenges of their times, and look back on how we faced the challenges of ours.

It is my hope that they will look back from the vantage point of history, with an economy more prosperous, communities more vibrant, citizens better educated, and an environment even cleaner and more beautiful than it is today, and ask, "how did we get to this great place?"

The answer to that question, if this future is to be, is that the leaders and citizens of our time make conscious choices to seize the future and to respond to the challenges and opportunities of change with all the optimism and vision we can muster.

Thank you and God bless the State of Maine.