MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-SECOND LEGISLATURE
SECOND REGULAR SESSION
7th Legislative Day
Thursday, February 12, 2026

Representative ARATA of New Gloucester assumed the Chair.

The House met according to adjournment and was called to order by the Speaker Pro Tem.

Prayer by Reverend Donna Dolham, Unitarian Universalist Community Church, Augusta.

National Anthem by Sharon Hood, Pittsfield.

Pledge of Allegiance.

Medical Provider of the Day, Kevin Fickenscher, MD, Kittery Point.

The Journal of Tuesday, February 10, 2026 was read and approved.

Under suspension of the rules, members were allowed to remove their jackets.

COMMUNICATIONS

The Following Communication: (H.C. 361)

STATE OF MAINE
SUPREME JUDICIAL COURT

February 5, 2026
Hon. Matthea Elisabeth Larsen Daughtry
President of the Senate
3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333-0003
Hon. Ryan D. Fecteau
Speaker of the House
2 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333-0002
Re: State of the Judiciary
Greetings,
Thank you for your invitation of January 30, 2026. Please be advised that I am pleased to accept your invitation and will be in attendance to address the Joint Session of the *Second Regular* Session of the 132nd Maine Legislature on February 12, 2026 at 11:00 a.m. concerning the State of the Judiciary.
Very truly yours,
S/Valerie Stanfill
Chief Justice

READ and **ORDERED PLACED ON FILE**.

The Following Communication: (H.C. 362)

SENATE OF MAINE
132ND LEGISLATURE
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

February 11, 2026
Honorable Robert B. Hunt
Clerk of the House
2 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333
Dear Clerk Hunt,
Pursuant to my authority under Title 23, MRSA, Chapter 304, §3036, I am pleased to appoint Amanda Meader of Winthrop to the *Abandoned and Discontinued Roads Commission*, effective immediately.
On this board, she will serve as a member of the commission from a statewide association of attorneys who has expertise in real estate law.
If you have any questions regarding this appointment, please do not hesitate to contact my office.
Sincerely,
S/Matthea Elisabeth Larsen Daughtry
President of the Senate

READ and **ORDERED PLACED ON FILE**.

The Following Communication: (H.C. 363)

STATE OF MAINE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
SPEAKER'S OFFICE
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002

February 12, 2026
Honorable Robert B. Hunt
Clerk of the House
2 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333
Dear Clerk Hunt:
Please be advised that pursuant to her authority, Governor Janet T. Mills has nominated the following:

on February 11, 2026

Andrew K. Lizotte, Esq. of Dover-Foxcroft for appointment as a Judge of the Maine District Court.
Pursuant to Article V, Part First, §8, of the Maine Constitution, this nomination is contingent on confirmation by the Maine State Senate after review by the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary.
The Honorable Sean Ociepka of Belfast for appointment as a Justice of the Maine Superior Court.
Pursuant to Article V, Part First, §8, of the Maine Constitution, this nomination is contingent on confirmation by the Maine State Senate after review by the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary.
The Honorable Harold L. Stewart, II of Bangor for appointment as an Active Retired Justice of the Maine Superior Court.
Pursuant to Article V, Part First, §8, of the Maine Constitution, this nomination is contingent on confirmation by the Maine State Senate after review by the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary.
Sincerely,
S/Ryan D. Fecteau
Speaker of the House

READ and with accompanying papers **ORDERED PLACED ON FILE**.

The Following Communication: (S.C. 805)

MAINE SENATE
132ND LEGISLATURE
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

February 10, 2026
Honorable Ryan Fecteau
Speaker of the House
2 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0002
Dear Speaker Fecteau:
In accordance with 3 M.R.S.A. §158 and Joint Rule 506 of the 132nd Maine Legislature, please be advised that the Senate today confirmed the following nominations:
Upon the recommendation of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry:

- Timothy D. Drake of China for reappointment to the Maine Milk Commission,
- William J. Randall of Palmyra for appointment to the Maine Milk Commission.

Upon the recommendation of the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources:

- Brooke E. Barnes of Harpswell for appointment to the Board of Environmental Protection,
- Eileen Bader Hall of Veazie for appointment to the Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund Board,
- Erin E. Merrill of Cornville for reappointment to the Maine Outdoor Heritage Fund Board.

Best Regards,
S/Darek M. Grant
Secretary of the Senate

READ and **ORDERED PLACED ON FILE**.

PETITIONS, BILLS AND RESOLVES REQUIRING REFERENCE

Bill "An Act Making Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027" (EMERGENCY)

(H.P. 1491) (L.D. 2212)

Sponsored by Representative GATTINE of Westbrook. (GOVERNOR'S BILL)

Committee on **APPROPRIATIONS AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS** suggested and ordered printed.

REFERRED to the Committee on **APPROPRIATIONS AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS** and ordered printed.

Sent for concurrence.

Bill "An Act Making Supplemental Allocations from the Highway Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027" (EMERGENCY)

(H.P. 1492) (L.D. 2213)

Sponsored by Representative CRAFTS of Newcastle. (GOVERNOR'S BILL)

Committee on **TRANSPORTATION** suggested and ordered printed.

REFERRED to the Committee on **TRANSPORTATION** and ordered printed.

Sent for concurrence.

By unanimous consent, all matters having been acted upon were **ORDERED SENT FORTHWITH**.

The following items were taken up out of order by unanimous consent:

SPECIAL SENTIMENT CALENDAR

In accordance with House Rule 519 and Joint Rule 213, the following item:

Recognizing:

the Hall-Dale High School Boys Soccer Team, of Farmingdale, which won the Class C State Championship. We extend our congratulations and best wishes;

(HLS 545)

Presented by Representative SHAGOURY of Hallowell.
Cosponsored by Senator HICKMAN of Kennebec, Representative MONTELL of Gardiner.

On **OBJECTION** of Representative GRAMLICH of Old Orchard Beach, was **REMOVED** from the Special Sentiment Calendar.

READ.

On motion of the same Representative, **TABLED** pending **PASSAGE** and later today assigned.

CONSENT CALENDAR
First Day

In accordance with House Rule 519, the following items appeared on the Consent Calendar for the First Day:

(S.P. 811) (L.D. 1998) Bill "An Act to Authorize Registration of Certain Cash-dispensing Machines Through the Nationwide Mortgage Licensing System and Registry and to Limit the Use of Certain Cash-dispensing Machines as Virtual Currency Kiosks" Committee on **HEALTH COVERAGE, INSURANCE AND FINANCIAL SERVICES** reporting **Ought to Pass**

(S.P. 820) (L.D. 2004) Bill "An Act to Enhance Support of Local Nutrition Incentive Programs by Modifying the Eligibility Requirements of the Fund to Address Food Insecurity and Provide Nutrition Incentives" Committee on **AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY** reporting **Ought to Pass**

(S.P. 833) (L.D. 2043) Bill "An Act to Raise the Ogunquit Sewer District Debt Limit" Committee on **ENERGY, UTILITIES AND TECHNOLOGY** reporting **Ought to Pass**

(H.P. 1346) (L.D. 2016) Bill "An Act to Eliminate the Thermal Imaging Camera Program" Committee on **CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY** reporting **Ought to Pass**

Under suspension of the rules, Second Day Consent Calendar notification was given.

There being no objection, the Senate Papers were **PASSED TO BE ENGROSSED** in concurrence and the House Paper was **PASSED TO BE ENGROSSED** and sent for concurrence.

COMMUNICATIONS

The Following Communication: (H.C. 364)

STATE OF MAINE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
SPEAKER'S OFFICE
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002

February 12, 2026
Honorable Robert B. Hunt
Clerk of the House
2 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333
Dear Clerk Hunt:
Pursuant to my authority under House Rule 201.1 (H), I appoint Representative Amy Bradstreet Arata, of New Gloucester to serve as Speaker Pro Tem to convene the House on February 12, 2026.
Sincerely,
S/Ryan D. Fecteau
Speaker of the House

READ and **ORDERED PLACED ON FILE**.

At this point, a message came from the Senate borne by Senator DUSON of Cumberland of that Body, proposing a Joint Convention of both branches of the Legislature to be held in the Hall of the House at 10:45 in the morning for the purpose of welcoming the Honorable Valerie Stanfill, Chief Justice of the Supreme Judicial Court, the Justices of the Supreme Judicial Court, and members of the Judiciary, and request the Chief Justice make such communication as she is pleased to make.

Thereupon the House voted to concur in the proposal for a Joint Convention to be held at 10:45 in the morning and the Speaker appointed Representative MOONEN of Portland to convey this message to the Senate.

By unanimous consent, all matters having been acted upon were **ORDERED SENT FORTHWITH**.

Subsequently, Representative MOONEN of Portland reported that he had delivered the message with which he was charged.

The Speaker resumed the Chair.

The House was called to order by the Speaker.

The SPEAKER: The Chair wishes to thank the Representative from New Gloucester, Representative Arata, for doing a fantastic job serving as Speaker Pro Tem. If you will all join me in thanking her.

At this point, the Senate came and a Joint Convention was formed.

In Convention

The President of the Senate, the Honorable Matthea Elisabeth Larsen Daughtry, in the Chair.

The Convention was called to order by the Chair.

On motion of Senator PIERCE of Cumberland, it was

ORDERED, that a Committee be appointed to wait upon the Honorable Valerie Stanfill, Chief Justice of the Maine Supreme Judicial Court; the Honorable Janet T. Mills, Governor of the State of Maine; the Justices of the Supreme Judicial Court; and Members of the Judiciary, and inform them that the two Branches of the Legislature are in Convention assembled, ready to receive such communications as the Chief Justice may be pleased to make.

The Order was **READ** and **PASSED**.

The Chair appointed:
The Senator from Cumberland, Sen. CARNEY
The Senator from Cumberland, Sen. TALBOT ROSS
The Senator from Penobscot, Sen. HAGGAN
The Representative from Falmouth, Rep. KUHN
The Representative from Auburn, Rep. LEE
The Representative from Bath, Rep. SINCLAIR
The Representative from Gorham, Rep. SATO
The Representative from Portland, Rep. PUGH
The Representative from Brewer, Rep. O'HALLORAN
The Representative from Skowhegan, Rep. POIRIER
The Representative from Rumford, Rep. HENDERSON
The Representative from Caratunk, Rep. CARUSO
The Representative from Fort Fairfield, Rep. BABIN
The Representative from the Passamaquoddy Tribe, Rep. DANA

Subsequently, Senator CARNEY of Cumberland, for the Committee, reported that the Committee had delivered the message with which it was charged and that the Honorable Valerie Stanfill, Chief Justice of the Maine Supreme Judicial Court; the Honorable Janet T. Mills, Governor of the State of Maine; and the Honorable Members of the Judiciary would attend forthwith.

The Chair welcomed to the Convention the Honorable Justices of the Maine Supreme Judicial Court: Associate Justice Andrew Mead; Associate Justice Catherine Connors; Associate Justice Rick Lawrence; Associate Justice Wayne Douglas; and Associate Justice Julia Lipez.

The Chair welcomed to the Convention the Honorable Valerie Stanfill, Chief Justice of the Maine Supreme Judicial Court, accompanied by the Honorable Janet T. Mills, Governor of the State of Maine.

The Chair recognized in the Gallery the following Members and guests of the Judicial Branch: Chief Justice Robert Mullen, Maine Superior Court; Chief Judge Brent Davis, Maine District Court; Deputy Chief Judge Eric Walker, Maine District Court; Amy Quinlan, State Court Administrator; and Barbara Cardone, Director of Legal Affairs and Public Relations.

The Chair requested the Honorable Valerie Stanfill, Chief Justice of the Maine Supreme Judicial Court, to please step forward and address the Joint Convention.

Chief Justice **STANFILL**: Good morning. Governor Mills, President Daughtry, Speaker Fecteau, distinguished Members and guests of the 132nd Maine Legislature and people of the State of Maine, I am very pleased to be here this morning to be able to report to you on the State of the Judiciary in Maine.

I know you know that the Judicial Branch is a separate and co-equal Branch of Maine government, but unless you're involved in Judiciary Committee or in AFA, for example, you may not completely appreciate what it means on a day-to-day basis. So, obviously, we are partnered with the other Branches on many things, but we operate and manage our own buildings, we negotiate and contract separately with employee unions, we have separate departments for HR, for IT and the like. And I say that as a preface to thanking the members of the Judicial Branch who have accompanied me here today and those who are not here today. They really support me every day and are critical to the success of the Maine Judicial Branch.

As you've already been introduced, some of our administrative team who are present here today include State Court Administrator Amy Quinlan, and she's the non-judicial head of the Judicial Branch. She's in charge of all aspects of management and I am very grateful for that wonderful partnership. I couldn't do it without her. And she's accompanied as well by a couple people who didn't get introduced. Tom Hild, who's our Chief of Finance and Administration, and our new Chief Information Officer, Chris Oberg. And, of course, Barbara Cardone, who you know, our Director of Legal Affairs, and I'm sure you all know Legislative Analyst Julie Finn, who's here today.

So, to my left are the Justices of the Supreme Judicial Court, and so, they comprise not only one of the most collegial courts to be found anywhere in this country; and I know, because I talk to other Chiefs, believe me, they don't have the same luxury I have of having a wonderfully collegial court; but they also work like a Board of Governors in the operation of the Branch. And so, you've been introduced to them. It was sort of in reverse order from where they came in, we can never seem to get that straight, whether we go from most junior to most senior or senior to junior, but I'm going to do it in the correct order from senior to junior. We have Justice Mead, Catherine Connors, Rick Lawrence, Wayne Douglas and Julia Lipez here today. And the Chiefs of the Trial Courts, who you've also already been introduced to, in addition to being sitting judges, they also operate like the Executive Committee of the organization in conjunction with me and Amy Quinlan, and are responsible for many of our day-to-day operations.

So, I wish I could name and personally thank every single member of the Judicial Branch, judges and staff alike, for their dedication to the people of this State every day. There really is no better group of people. They are working incredibly hard these days and I am so grateful to all of them.

As is the tradition for the State of the Judiciary Address, though, I'm going to highlight both where we've been and where we're going. I would say, in short, progress. Since I became Chief Justice, I've focused on the importance of ensuring that the Maine Judicial Branch has adequate resources to fulfill our mission of providing fair and timely access to justice to all. Our ability to do that really rests on three key components: sufficient staffing, and that means both staff and judges; reliable and secure technology infrastructure, which is critical these days; as well as safe and accessible courthouses. And, as I say, we are making progress in all of these areas.

Staffing. We have been understaffed, the Maine Judicial Branch, I know you've all heard that from me and my predecessors, but we really have operated very lean and been understaffed for years. That's not going to change overnight, we're not asking it to change overnight. Some of you may recall that a few years ago, the National Center for State Courts, in fact, conducted a study of our staffing and among other things observed that we really need an additional 54 court clerk positions alone in order to process the cases that we have. And it really is on the behind-the-scenes staffing that we are so lean compared to other states. It's always hard to compare state to state because what's within the Judicial Branch or not is different from state to state, but I promise you, we are small and mighty. In any event, you've been working with us to increase those positions and we are grateful for that.

For some years, we have, as many organizations have, struggled to attract and hire people into some of the positions, particularly marshals. Last year, in fact, you agreed to help reclassify those positions and I'm pleased to report it really has helped in both hiring and retention. So, overall, we do have fewer vacant positions in those positions than we've had in the past. So, again, I'm grateful. In short, we've made strides on the staffing front together and we still have a way to go, but we have made strides, it is progress. Now, if we can only do something about Judicial salaries, which are 51st in the Country; just have to throw that out there, that we are the bottom. But moving on, I guess that's for another Legislature.

Moving on. Technology. The Judicial Branch has been turning to technology really with unprecedented speed in the last several years to efficiently manage our increasingly complex caseloads. I think many of you are aware it's not that the numbers, except for in the Supreme Judicial Court, the numbers elsewhere are not initially going up, but the cases are increasingly complex. Technological solutions and tools are used really every day; to create the court record, to provide remote access to proceedings, to enable video interpreting with all the different interpreters that we need, some of whom we don't even have necessarily that language here in the State of Maine, to support scheduling payment of mediators and of course by attorneys and litigants every day in the courtroom to present their cases and evidence. I don't think we get cases these days who don't have electronic evidence, even if it's just those text messages on the phone.

So, we're always looking at tools, including, frankly, AI. We're trying to figure out what to do there to expand access to justice. You may recall that in last year's biennial budget, we asked for and received funds for updating and maintaining the technology infrastructure, so, I thought I'd let you know that as a result, we have been updating the Zoom carts, which literally were carts with TV screens on them that we cobbled together during the pandemic, and replacing them with modern Neat Bar technology that brings better audio and video communication into the courts, especially of your hybrid and remote proceedings, which are so common every day in our courthouses.

We're also in the process of updating the hardware and the software for the courtroom recording technology; which, frankly, was broken in a lot of our courtrooms; used for recording the official court records and transcripts, it's known as For the Record. The updated version of For the Record is being installed in courtrooms throughout the State over this biennium and we've made great progress on that as well.

Most exciting of all, in 2025, we accelerated our installation and rollout of Maine eCourts and eFiling for all case types. When I was here last year, we had not yet implemented eFiling and eCourts in criminal cases, for example. And in June, we launched Maine eCourts for criminal and juvenile cases in the Androscoggin Superior and Lewiston District Courts. They were our guinea pigs. We have an incredible group down there and they were wonderful in working through a lot of the issues. This was the first rollout that we had of criminal and juvenile cases. Those cases require, of course, close coordination and collaboration not only with the Maine Attorney General, the district attorneys, public defenders and private attorneys; it's a huge volume of cases to enable a smooth transition, you know, from conventional filing to eFiling; but also the Department of Public Safety is a key, key partner in that, as integrations for the Metro Switch maintained by DPS are critical for things like warrants and bail, which have to update immediately and be accurate.

After we smoothed out a few of the bumps down there, we followed up in September with the installation of Maine eCourts for criminal and juvenile matters in the rest of Region III, which is Rumford, Farmington and the South Paris courts. So, those five courts in Region III are now using Maine eCourts for all case types. Then, on February 2nd, so, technically not 2025, but just last week, we went live for all case types in Region IV, which is Augusta, Waterville and Skowhegan courts. That was the first time we sort of did everything, everywhere, all at once. So, we weren't too sure how it was going to go and I think it's gone really pretty smoothly, considering. There are going to be bumps, of course, along the way, but it works, is what I'm really saying. Our goal is to continue with rollouts approximately every two months for the rest of the year. Region I, which is the York Judicial Center, is scheduled for March 30th. So, this schedule hopefully is going to allow us to deploy Maine eCourts within the next year throughout the State, so that all trial courts will be digital for all case types by the time I come back here next year, finally.

A couple years ago, I think I explained that implementation of Maine eCourts required switching every desk in every courthouse from Apple computers to PCs. We were the only Judicial Branch in the country that worked on Apple. So, I raise that because I think it's emblematic of all the little hidden myriad challenges involved and why it's taking us so long to get to where we are and why it feels so good to be where we are now. As we go around the State, we have to assess each facility, for example, to make sure it will support the new technology. So, a couple of examples to give you an idea of what I mean. Waterville District Court, we had to completely rewire it in order to put in the system. That's a leased facility and we have a landlord that worked really well with us, but we had to completely rewire it. Houlton; beautiful, historic courthouse, has nice wooden, you know, like here, right, a beautiful wooden bench and a clerk's bench in front of it, but they are old-fashioned writing desks with a slanted surface, you know, antique. You can't put computers on those, we need to have the screens, the monitors, *et cetera*. So, we basically; we'll leave them looking beautiful from everywhere else, but inside, we have to rebuild those, essentially, in order to install the technology. So, that's just an idea of the little challenges that are involved in doing this, it's not like just flipping a switch, right, on a computer server. So, you get the idea.

So, there have been bumps, but each rollout has been better and there are improvements that will be made, but we did it and we're going to continue to do it this year. And some of the things that we think we could improve are, frankly, we want to wait until we just get it installed everywhere so that we can then work on updating, improving, *et cetera*.

I want to say these rollouts were the biggest asks so far of the Branch and of court users and I really, again, need to thank all of those involved, from information technology to court operations to clerks to judges to facilities, communications, process specialists. It's really an all-hands-on-deck effort for the Judicial Branch and those hands have been nothing short of heroic in this last year. And let me just say, I think it is paying off. I've been able to say that to you and also a few weeks ago, I addressed the Annual Meeting of the State Bar Association and I asked for questions; I didn't get any, but I got one comment. And the comment was, thank you for bringing Maine courts into the 21st century. So, we're doing it. So, while it takes a village, I do want to pause to recognize the leader of our Maine eCourts effort, who's here today. I said at the outset that Chris Oberg is our new Chief Information Officer. Dave Packard, who had been with us for many years, retired last week. Sad to see him go. Chris was hired from within the Judicial Branch and he has been the guy. He has been managing the Maine eCourts implementation from the start. So, it's only fair that I give a shout-out to Chris Oberg, who's been working tirelessly to ensure the success of the project, and Chris, I'm hoping you'll stand and take the recognition from the whole convention. I know you're here somewhere. So, thank you.

And I just also want to mention that in addition to a modern case management system and eFiling, those are the most obvious, but it's really a whole suite of products. And so, we've also implemented a new electronic payment site, Defendant Access, in the court locations with Maine eCourts. And Representative Moonen, I know this; where are you; this is so near and dear, he knows this is coming, but we implemented a program to deliver hearing reminders by text message for criminal defendants who have a cell number on file with the court. So, defendants are now texted three days in advance of their upcoming hearing dates, with the goal of, of course, trying to reduce failures to appear in our court system.

Courthouses. 2025 was both an exciting year and a challenging year for our courthouses. And by that, I really mean literally the buildings. With your permission and the full support of the local Bar, we closed the District Court courthouse in Madawaska. Most of the towns served in that district now go to Fort Kent, the remainder go to Caribou. It was a leased facility that was only open two days a month. And so, it felt like we weren't getting as; what is it, a lot of juice for the squeeze, I don't know. It was staffed by the Fort Kent clerks, and in fact, Fort Kent had to close on the days Madawaska was open. So, we don't consider courthouse closures lightly, but this one seemed to make sense to frankly everyone involved, including the Bar and the local courts, *et cetera*.

Challenges we faced this year included the discovery of mold in the basement of the Lincoln District Court, which had to be closed for cleaning for a period of time, I think it was some weeks, it wasn't a hugely long period of time. During that period, Lincoln's cases were temporarily heard instead in Millinocket and, interesting, like Fort Kent and Madawaska, Lincoln and Millinocket are sort of our other pair, if you will, where each is closed when the other is open and it's the same clerks go back and forth between the facilities. So, I think the disruption was, I think, minimal, and both are now fully open.

Big challenge posed by Newport District Court, and I see you over there. We discovered extensive mold in that leased building and that led to its closure in early spring. All Newport operations have been relocated to Bangor since then. Our efforts at working with the landlord there to resolve the issues have not been successful to date and, in fact, this last fall, we put out a call for proposals to move the location of the court. That would be very expensive. To be clear, it has not been our intent to permanently close the Newport courthouse, but the cost involved in getting a new facility up and running is significant. We understand the importance of providing convenient access to court facilities in this State, particularly in rural communities, but we also understand that resources are limited, and so, whether we continue to have a court location in Newport really is at least somewhat dependent on your will, given the significant cost involved. Like I say, we don't have any intention to close it, but we also understand that there is a significant cost to get a new facility up and running. This is what happens with aging facilities, right, across the State, and I know we're not alone in dealing with that, but that's one of the problems.

There is also exciting news on the building front. Intensive planning is ongoing for the three new courthouse facilities to be funded by the bonds that were authorized by the Legislature in 2024 and issued last summer. Each project will consolidate court services into modern, safe judicial centers, supporting the operations of both Superior Court and District Court in one location. The Hancock Judicial Center is a new courthouse construction project. We originally would've really liked to have updated the existing facility, but it really just can't be done. So, with the assistance of the City of Ellsworth, we've now obtained a site off of High Street, behind the; those of you who are familiar, behind the L.L. Bean outlet and Merrill Furniture. North Peak Architecture of Lyman, Maine, has been selected as the architect for the project and they've done some of our other courthouses and done a wonderful job. The City of Ellsworth has completed the access road to the new site, and we expect to break ground in the spring, maybe summer, but in the upcoming spring.

Next, we are also building an addition to the Skowhegan District Court in Skowhegan that will also consolidate operations in courtrooms for both trial courts into a Somerset County Judicial Center. Currently, the District Court and the Superior Court are sort of across the street from each other. Upon completion, we'll end up vacating the county building across the street. WBRC Architects of Bangor and Portland has been selected as the architect for the project, and we hope to begin construction on that project in the fall of 2026. So, a little after the other one.

Finally, we also have hired Harriman of Auburn as the architect for the new Androscoggin Judicial Center in Lewiston. This will be an addition onto the existing Lewiston District Court in downtown Lewiston. We were able to acquire the adjacent building, the old Depositor's Trust/KeyBank Building. And so, it, again, will consolidate the trial courts. Currently, they are in Auburn and Lewiston and the files go back and forth across the river. So, it will be able to consolidate into one building. And it is the most complicated build because of it being downtown and trying to connect two old buildings, *et cetera*; it will be a challenge, but we hope to begin construction on that facility in 2027. So, as with Somerset, that also means we'll be vacating the county building in Auburn when the new one is complete.

As an aside, abandoning, I have to say, the old historic courtrooms makes me sad, and I know it makes the Chief Executive sad, too. We have tried to avoid it where we can and we were able to keep the old courtrooms, for example, in South Paris and in Augusta and add on and keep these glorious old courtrooms. And I have to say, leaving Auburn particularly saddens me, as I know it does the Chief Executive, because I spent much of my career in that courthouse. However, the reality is that most of the county facilities across the State are aging and aging and aging and simply cannot support more modern and safe court operations.

A few other updates. The backlog continues to improve, although slowly, on the criminal side. The civil backlog is about returned to pre-pandemic levels. I think we're caught up pretty much on civil, it always goes back and forth, but I think we're pretty much caught up on civil. Many of the family cases are still significantly delayed, although again, I think we've made progress since I was here last year. But we continue to work on that. Last year, I had reported that the; I actually looked back to see what I told you, you know, to make sure; last year, I reported that the criminal caseload was running about 35% higher than pre-pandemic levels, about half what it was at the height of the pandemic, but nonetheless still about 35% higher. Now, a year later, the criminal caseload is running more like 25 to 30%. So, again, it's a little reduced, but still above pre-pandemic levels. And so, it's an improvement, but we still have a long way to go. I think we told you years ago it was going to take us time to catch up, and it is, but at least it's moving in the right direction.

To that end, we are also taking a hard look on how we process criminal cases to see where we can be more efficient. Delays in criminal cases really hurt everyone involved. We have victims, we have defendants, you know, more work when every time something gets rescheduled, all the things. The average age of our criminal cases is really simply too old. To that end, as a first step, last spring, we hosted a New England Regional Conference on Criminal Case Processing funded by the MacArthur Foundation. Amy Quinlan will tell you that when they sent a call out to the New England states, it took me about a hot two seconds to say we'll do it. Because I am concerned about how we process criminal cases in this State. On January 1st, we started a pilot project in the Bangor criminal dockets to try to put some of the ideas to work. And so, it's a different process being applied to cases as they come in in Bangor, and we'll be evaluating whether those processes; we actually worked with our data people to make sure that it would be trackable, if you will, and so, we'll evaluate, see if it helps, if they're effective, and that will help inform what changes we may incorporate statewide to increase efficiency of our criminal case processing.

On a related note, I am pleased to report, and I know you've probably heard this from other organizations as well, progress has been made in the last year in cases constitutionally requiring appointed counsel. Again, when I was here a year ago, I told you there were about 1,150 matters pending without counsel at the end of 2025, including 998, almost a thousand criminal cases, post-conviction reviewed juvenile matters, another 112 child protective, 40 appeals. That's where we were December 30th, a year ago. Those numbers are improved, but they haven't disappeared. We have about 225; it fluctuates day to day, so, giving numbers is a little tricky, but about 225 criminal cases, 30 child protective cases and 30 appeals at any given time pending, which we have been unable to appoint counsel in a timely fashion. So, while the total number of cases lacking counsel is significantly reduced, it's still unacceptably high. There shouldn't be any. This shouldn't be a statistic that we're tracking at all. No one should be having to wait for an attorney appointed to represent

them in cases in which there are significant rights and liberty interests at stake. Every case matters. And so, everything we can do for every case is important. This is something we all need to continue to work on, all of the stakeholders involved in this.

Our school outreach is ongoing and we're trying to increase it a bit. As we have for many years, we heard oral arguments in three high schools. It's so much fun to do this, I love it. In October, we were at Upper Kennebec Valley High School in Bingham, Oak Hill High School in Wales and Falmouth High School in Falmouth. I will say the contrast, I've spent a lot of time, actually, in the Upper Kennebec Valley, but the contrast between the high school in Bingham and the high school in Falmouth was significant. It was interesting. Just the facilities, I mean, it's so different. In any event, in addition, we've had students from around the State visiting courts to watch trial court proceedings, tour a courthouse, visit with a judge or justice about how a court docket is administered. Justice Mead was involved in a really big program up in Penobscot and attend programs, you know, about the various career opportunities within the State Court system. So, I'm really hoping to continue increasing school outreach.

Together with the federal courts, we're actually planning two events to commemorate the 250th anniversary of this country, the Semiquincentennial. First, to recognize Law Day on May 1st, we're going to do a joint presentation in the Supreme Judicial Courtroom in Portland, maybe some of you will come. But also, we're going to try to plan a bigger event. We have just started, so, we're still in the, what we call the spitballing stage, but for the fall, in which we hope to host an event which schools would be able to participate in remotely, and so, that we can really reach out to a lot of different people. So, no details yet, as I say, we're just beginning the planning, but that's what we hope to do this fall.

So, I'm excited to increase community engagement. The Judicial Branch is usually the least seen by the public, unless they actually have to go to court, of all of the branches of government. And I think these efforts are particularly important in our current public climate. I worry that in these times of increasing partisanship and polarization that we're losing track of what unites us in these United States. I've said before that public trust and confidence in our public institutions, including the justice system, is historically low. And as that trust decreases, attacks on judges, both in word and in deed, have increased. We shouldn't tolerate this. Judicial independence is one of the cornerstones of the rule of law in this country. Disagreement with judicial interpretation cannot result in threatening judges for simply doing their work. I know you understand this, too, because disagreements should also not result in threats to legislators, either. And this is something we're seeing across the country.

This past summer in Maine, I was honored to host the National Gathering of Chief Justices and State Court Administrators from across the country, sponsored by the National Center for State Courts. You will be happy to hear that everyone fell in love with Maine and all we have to offer. I was getting texts saying, oh, my God, you have such a beautiful State. It was really a resounding success. I was privileged, though, at that conference, to be able to introduce Chief Justice John Roberts of the United States Supreme Court to address the Chiefs from across the country. I'm going to quote him: "Judicial rulings can provoke strong and passionate reactions, and those expressions of public sentiment, whether criticism or praise, are not threats to judicial independence. To the contrary, public engagement with the work of the courts results in a better-informed policy and a more robust democracy. Unfortunately, there are four areas of illegitimate activity that do threaten the independence of judges on which the rule of law depends; violence, intimidation, disinformation and threats to defy lawfully entered judgments." So, those were the words of Chief Justice Roberts.

So, I worry that even here in Maine, those areas of illegitimate activity are on the rise. We have judges getting increasing threats. I fear that divisive partisanship will infect civil discourse and consideration of even issues that should unite us, that are not partisan at all. I note that on the national level, the press likes to identify judges; federal judges, this is always; who, by the way, only hear two to three percent of the cases in this country, 97 to 98% of cases are heard by state court judges. Think about that. They tend to be identified as conservative or liberal, right? A Trump judge or an Obama judge. We don't do that here, nor should we. Maine has historically been nonpartisan in the confirmation of State judges. If we were to identify Maine judges by the Chief Executive who appoints them, then let me just say that in this very room, we have McKernon judges, King judges, Baldacci judges and LePage judges and every single one of us were reappointed by every Chief Executive along the way, of each party, including Chief Executive Mills. Those labels you see are meaningless. They must remain so. We are simply judges, doing our best to faithfully, impartially and independently administer justice in this State.

Let me wrap up by saying it is indeed a pleasure to be able to address this Joint Convention. Particularly in this short session, I know time is dear and that you have a lot of pressing matters. However, the primary importance of the Chief Justice's annual address lies not in the content alone, but in the pause we take to recognize and celebrate the American experiment of republican government. A pause that's never been so important as it is today. There are the three co-equal branches of government and the only times, although there's a Statute that says we're supposed to do it other times, but the only times the three branches of Maine's government reliably come together, quite literally in the same room, are for the annual addresses of the Chief Executive and the annual address of the Chief Justice to the Joint Convention. That we all come together here despite our differences is one of the most potent symbols we can offer to the citizens of the State of Maine.

When lawyers are admitted to the Bar of this State, when you're sworn in as Legislators or as Chief Executive when judges are sworn in to judicial office, we all take an oath. We swear to support the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of this State. That promise is the promise of the rule of law in this country, that all people and institutions are accountable under laws that are publicly promulgated by the Legislature, equally enforced by the Executive and independently adjudicated by the Judiciary. Our oaths bind all of us together in service to the citizens of this State. Public trust in our justice system, and indeed in all government institutions, is rarely dismantled in one fell swoop. It can erode; a death by a thousand cuts. We, all of us, need to guard against those cuts on a daily basis. We do so by upholding the rule of law, by supporting the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of this State, as we have all sworn to do. Thank you for your time this morning.

At the conclusion of the address, the Chief Justice withdrew amid the applause of the Convention, the audience rising.

The purpose for which the Joint Convention was assembled having been accomplished, the Chair declared the same dissolved.

The Senate then retired to its chamber.

(After the Convention)

The House was called to order by the Speaker.

ENACTORS
Emergency Measure

An Act to Provide a Sales Tax Exemption for Housing Constructed Off-site Similar to That for On-site Construction

(S.P. 575) (L.D. 1419)
(C. "A" S-491)

Was reported by the Committee on **Engrossed Bills** as truly and strictly engrossed. This being an emergency measure, a two-thirds vote of all the members elected to the House being necessary, a total was taken. 121 voted in favor of the same and 0 against, and accordingly the Bill was **PASSED TO BE ENACTED**, signed by the Speaker and sent to the Senate.

Pursuant to the Constitution
Public Land

Resolve, Authorizing the Director of the Bureau of Parks and Lands to Make Certain Land Transactions in Aroostook and Somerset Counties

(S.P. 822) (L.D. 2006)
(C. "A" S-490)

Was reported by the Committee on **Engrossed Bills** as truly and strictly engrossed. In accordance with the provisions of Section 23 of Article IX of the Constitution, a two-thirds vote of all the members elected to the House being necessary, a total was taken. 108 voted in favor of the same and 0 against, and accordingly the Resolve was **FINALLY PASSED**, signed by the Speaker and sent to the Senate.

Acts

An Act to Add an Online Option for Reporting of Suspected Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of Adults

(H.P. 1351) (L.D. 2021)

Was reported by the Committee on **Engrossed Bills** as truly and strictly engrossed, **PASSED TO BE ENACTED**, signed by the Speaker and sent to the Senate.

Resolve

Resolve, to Name the New East Main Street Bridge in Dover-Foxcroft in Honor of Private Willard Merrill and Private Barton Merrill, Jr.

(H.P. 1359) (L.D. 2029)

Was reported by the Committee on **Engrossed Bills** as truly and strictly engrossed, **FINALLY PASSED**, signed by the Speaker and sent to the Senate.

By unanimous consent, all matters having been acted upon were **ORDERED SENT FORTHWITH**.

ORDERS

On motion of Representative PAUL of Winterport, the following Joint Resolution: (H.P. 1485) (Cosponsored by Senator STEWART of Aroostook and Representatives: BAGSHAW of Windham, CIMINO of Bridgton, COLLINS of Sidney, HAGGAN of Hampden, PERKINS of Dover-Foxcroft, SMITH of Palermo, SOBOLESKI of Phillips, WHITE of Guilford) (Approved for introduction by a majority of the Legislative Council pursuant to Joint Rule 214)

JOINT RESOLUTION TO HONOR THE LIFE, FAITH, LEADERSHIP AND LEGACY OF CHARLES "CHARLIE" JAMES KIRK

WHEREAS, Charles "Charlie" James Kirk, born October 14, 1993, was a courageous American patriot and faithful Christian whose life was tragically and unjustly cut short in an act of political violence on September 10, 2025, at Utah Valley University; and

WHEREAS, Charlie Kirk made the decision to follow Jesus Christ as a young person and boldly lived out his faith with conviction, courage and compassion, grounding his life and work in daily devotion to Scripture, prayer and the Gospel message; and

WHEREAS, Charlie Kirk was a devoted husband to his wife Erika, and a loving father to their daughter and son, exemplifying the virtues of faith, fidelity and fatherhood; and

WHEREAS, at 18 years of age, Charlie Kirk founded Turning Point USA in 2012, which grew to more than 3,500 campus chapters and over 250,000 members nationwide, mobilizing young Americans to embrace fiscal responsibility, free markets, limited government and the blessings of liberty; and

WHEREAS, through his leadership, Turning Point USA helped register and mobilize more than 125,000 new voters in the 2024 election, narrowing the youth voter gap and shaping civic engagement among the next generation; and

WHEREAS, Charlie Kirk became one of the most prominent Christian voices in America, engaging in civil discourse on college campuses, media platforms and national forums, always seeking to elevate truth, defend Biblical values and strengthen the Republic; and

WHEREAS, Charlie Kirk's journey of faith was deepened by his study of Scripture and by life-changing experiences such as his 2018 pilgrimage to the Holy Land, which inspired his unapologetic commitment to proclaiming Christ and mentoring others to do the same; and

WHEREAS, Charlie Kirk embodied the values of the First Amendment, exercising his right to speak freely, challenge prevailing narratives and stand as a model of conviction with respect for his fellow Americans; and

WHEREAS, his assassination is not only a heinous act of violence but also a sobering reminder of the rising dangers of political extremism and hatred in our society, which threaten the peace, liberty and civility essential to a healthy civic order; and

WHEREAS, Charlie Kirk's death must not divide us further but instead serve as a call to recommit ourselves to dialogue, respect and the timeless American principles of liberty governed by truth; and

WHEREAS, Charlie Kirk would not have us respond with despair, but with renewed purpose to speak truth with courage, to stand firm in faith, to seek unity without compromising conviction and to live out the values he championed: faith, family and freedom; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED: That We, the Members of the One Hundred and Thirty-second Legislature now assembled in the Second Regular Session, on behalf of the people we represent, take this opportunity:

1. To condemn, in the strongest possible terms, the assassination of Charles "Charlie" James Kirk and all forms of political violence;

2. To extend our deepest condolences and prayers to Charlie Kirk's family, including his wife, Erika, and their children;

3. To honor the life, faith, leadership and legacy of Charlie Kirk, whose example inspired a generation to cherish liberty and stand firm in their faith; and

4. To call upon all Americans, regardless of party or creed, to reject political violence, recommit to respectful debate, uphold American values and recognize one another as fellow citizens.

READ.

The SPEAKER: The Chair recognizes the Representative from Winterport, Representative Paul.

Representative **PAUL**: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honored to bring this Resolution before us today. It is right, fitting, that we should pause as one Body to mourn a life stolen far too soon and to declare with unmistakable moral clarity that political violence is evil and it has no home in America.

I rise with a heavy heart to honor Charles "Charlie" James Kirk, a devoted husband, a loving father, a man anchored in deep faith and a fearless voice whose life was ended by an act of sheer political violence. But first, let's remember not how his life ended, but how it was lived.

Charlie Kirk was not born into privilege, he inherited no platform and he held no office. At just 18 years old, when most young people are still searching for their path, he stepped forward with a bold and determined belief. His generation could think bigger, act with greater courage and engage more deeply in the life of this Republic. He built a movement not with coercion or fear, but with open conversation. He walked into hostile college campuses, microphone in hand and said come debate me, disagree with me, prove me wrong. He even invited those who disagreed with him the most fiercely to come to the front of the line. Who among us could say we would do the same thing? He welcomed argument because he believed the bedrock truth of a free society; that ideas must be debated, never destroyed, and people must be engaged and never cancelled. At the heart of it all was his repeated mission to make Heaven crowded. His faith was no mere slogan; it was his compass. It shaped his words, his leadership and even how he treated those who opposed him the most fiercely. He knew freedom is fragile, truth must be spoken boldly and courage is not optional in the arena of ideas.

That brings us to why we gather here today. And let me state this plainly, in words that should unite every one of us, regardless of party or creed. Political violence has no place in the United States, not from the left, not from the right, nowhere in a nation built on ordered liberty. Nobody deserves to die for their beliefs; not politicians, not public figures, not ordinary citizens, not Minnesota lawmakers and certainly not a 31-year-old husband and father who just wanted to have open conversations with people.

His voice was silenced by a single bullet on a college campus that he loved to engage, yet the conversations he started continue because bullets cannot silence the truth. Young Americans still gather, debate and seek truth because Charlie showed us how. Bullets may wound the body, but they cannot extinguish a movement rooted in faith and freedom. Yet Charlie Kirk's death lays bare uniquely chilling reality. He held no elected office, no voter ever marked a ballot for him, he wielded no formal power. He was simply a citizen, a husband and a father who dared to speak openly about life's deepest questions; truth, meaning, freedom and faith. So, we must confront the question that should haunt all of us. What was his crime? Speaking? Challenging ideas? Refusing to be silent? No one; no one should die for having an opinion. Political violence is never acceptable. It is the ultimate dehumanization, born from small minds that attack people instead of debating ideas. As Eleanor Roosevelt so wisely put it, "great minds discuss ideas, average minds discuss events and small minds discuss people."

Charlie Kirk embodied the highest calling, the great mind. He discussed big ideas; liberty, opportunity, constitutional principles; with clarity and conviction, refusing to descend to personal attacks or false narratives spread for political gain. He lived to a higher standard. He championed big ideas with passion and with clarity, refusing to descend into petty attacks. He showed us the power of ideas over insults, hope over hate and truth over tribalism. Yet today, too many twist words, misrepresent motives and reduce opponents to enemies unworthy of safety or decency. Too often, false narratives are spread for gain, motives are twisted and opponents are dehumanized, reduced from fellow citizens with ideas to enemies unworthy of respect. This small-minded focus on attacking people rather than debating ideas poisons our discourse and invites tragedy. I wish we could return to a higher standard. Vigorous debate over policies and principles, always remembering the shared humanity on the other side. A Maine and a nation where disagreement does not mean danger, where every person, regardless of viewpoint, can live, speak and return home safely to their loved ones.

But violence does not erupt from nowhere. It festers where honest discourse collapses, where opponents become enemies, where partial truths harden into venomous lies. Where false narratives are repeated until they feel like the facts. Where part of a story becomes someone's full truth. It is those false narratives that turned Charlie Kirk into a target. Everything many people incorrectly believed about Charlie Kirk was built on fragments, distortions or outright falsehoods. And false narratives do something profoundly dangerous. They create permission structures for hatred and they make the unthinkable begin to feel justified. That is how societies slide into darkness. Not in one dramatic plunge, but inch by inch as we grow comfortable dehumanizing one another. When discourse dies, violence is born. Yet even now, especially now, we must cling to what endures. Truth cannot be killed. It does not bleed, it does not stay buried, it does not bow to terror. As scripture declares in John 1:5, "The light shines in

the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it." Evil can shock us and it can wound us deeply, but it does not and it will not have the final word. The question before us is not merely how we mourn, it is who we will choose to become.

Colleagues, every generation faces this test in tragedy. What kind of people will we be? Will we shrink back, grow silent and let fear shrink the boundaries of acceptable thought? Or will we rise with courage? Will we recommit to civil discourse not as a tactic, but as a moral duty? Will we defend the right to speak most fiercely with those who disagree with us? Let this moment be more than words. Let it be our pledge to reject political violence in every form, to recommit to respectful debate, to uphold the American values that bind us and to recognize one another as fellow citizens made in the image of God.

Charlie's steadfast devotion to Christ, the Constitution, civil discourse and biblical truth inspired a generation to cherish liberty and stand firm in the faith. Today, we honor that legacy by vowing to carry his torch forward, defending open debate, protecting the vulnerable voices and proving that reason triumphs over rage. A nation that cannot talk to itself cannot long endure. By standing together here, this House declares with one voice; we reject political violence, we honor a life of unwavering conviction, we reaffirm this essential truth that ideas must always be answered with reason and never with violence. May we prove worthy of the freedoms that we inherit. May Maine lead the nation in healing our divided land. And may we never forget that courage is contagious and the truth is unstoppable. Thank you.

The SPEAKER: The Chair recognizes the Representative from Winter Harbor, Representative Faulkingham.

Representative **FAULKINGHAM**: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to stand for a minute to acknowledge the passing of Charlie Kirk.

It was, I think unfortunately, just under a year ago that I stood to recognize the death of Melissa Hortman; someone that you, Mr. Speaker, were friends with; and condemn her killing and condemn all political violence. And so, I should stand firm in it and condemn it once again to someone that meant a lot more to me than Melissa Hortman personally, but it doesn't matter how much the person means to you, political violence is something that we should all condemn.

The concept of killing someone because you disagree with them or because someone has too much voice or is too impactful, that they will be killed for it is something we should all reject. But it's easy to reject the concept of political violence. That's the easy part, Mr. Speaker. The hard part is doing what Charlie did. And if you hated what Charlie said, the good thing about him is he would give you a microphone and let you say all you wanted to say and speak your point, and then you wouldn't be met with violence, you wouldn't be met with people shutting you up or stopping you from coming in or anything like that. You'd be given an open platform, the ability to say what you wanted, and then Charlie would just simply debate you. Charlie would give his perspective. And that was an example that we should all follow and that's what we should really hold on to that Charlie did that we need more of.

And the reason why Charlie was doing that is because he recognized what was happening in America, the polarization of our politics, and he knew the only way to get through that was to talk to people. And that's what he did, he set out to talk to people. And it's unfortunate that because of that, he was killed. But his death doesn't need to be the end of what he was doing. It's something we all need to engage in, Mr. Speaker. We all need to talk more with each other, so that we don't continue down this road that unfortunately the country has, you know, put itself on, both left and right. We need to do more of what Charlie was doing and, you know, I just want to say to Charlie; well done, good and faithful servant.

The SPEAKER: The Chair recognizes the Representative from Auburn, Representative Libby.

Representative **LIBBY**: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker and Ladies and Gentlemen of the House, I'd like to reread a portion of this Order. "Whereas, Charlie Kirk embodied the values of the First Amendment, exercising his right to speak freely, challenging prevailing narratives and stand as a model of conviction, with respect for his fellow Americans." Mr. Speaker, last year, I realized that I had taken my First Amendment right to free speech entirely for granted for, I would say, most of my life. Just like breathing, we wake up every morning and it's there. It's something you expect and anticipate. It's unquestioned. It's a basic American right. I don't think that Charlie Kirk ever took that right for granted. And I would advocate that we must not, because I believe that that right is under attack in America today and that's one of the reasons that Charlie Kirk did what he did. You see, without freedom of speech, none of our other rights exist. You cannot have freedom of religion if you don't have the freedom to articulate what you believe. You can't have the right to assemble if you can't say why you're gathering. You can't petition your government or, more importantly, challenge your government, if your voice can be silenced the moment it becomes inconvenient.

Mr. Speaker, the fact is free speech is not just another right. Charlie Kirk recognized that free speech is the right that protects every other right that we have in this Country. But today, the boundaries of acceptable speech; acceptable speech; are narrowing. And that's not by chance, but it's by deliberate design, utilizing fear and intimidation to silence those who challenge the status quo. We see this in cancel culture, shadow banning and political retaliation. Even up until the assassination of Charlie Kirk.

Not every challenge against the First Amendment comes through legislation or through the courts. When people feel that they are alone, when they feel that no one understands or agrees with what they think, they're more likely to stay silent. And when they fear being canceled, or worse, then silence is almost certain. But when they see others stand, when they see others speak boldly, when they see others articulate the truth with clarity, with kindness and with a logic that cannot be denied, then it sparks something. And Charlie Kirk sparked that. He sparked courage. He gave the next generation courage. He gave courage to those who were afraid to speak the truth. He gave courage to those who were intimidated into silence. He told a generation of young conservatives that they are not alone. And he started a movement by being bold in his exercise of free speech by simply speaking the truth.

Charlie Kirk was murdered because of his exercise of free speech. He was murdered because he spoke the truth. After all, freedom of speech that leads to freedom of thought is incredibly dangerous to an ideology that's built on lies. In the wake of Charlie Kirk's death, it is our responsibility, it our responsibility as citizens, not as legislators but as citizens, to ensure that we carry on his legacy. What should we do? We should speak the truth with clarity and courage, serving as an example for the next generation that is watching us. We should speak that truth even when it's uncomfortable, even when it comes at a cost and, I would say, we must speak the

truth especially when it comes at a cost. Because that is when the stakes are the very highest.

Exercising our First Amendment right to free speech is not just a right, and we should not take it for granted. It is a moral obligation in a free society if we want to remain a free society. Because if we lose the ability to speak, to question and to challenge, then we lose our republic. Charlie Kirk understood that.

The SPEAKER: The Chair recognizes the Representative from Palermo, Representative Smith.

Representative **SMITH**: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Members of the House, I just want to put a personal touch on this.

On the day that Charlie Kirk died, I was actually taking a nap. And when I woke up, I found my text messages from my three children. Some of these catalogue the events: 'Shots fired at a big Charlie Kirk event in Utah five minutes ago. No info at all yet, just videos from afar of people running.' 'Oh, my God. Charlie Kirk has been shot in the head or neck.' 'Oh, my gosh. I just left the house, but I think I have to go home, I'm literally freaking out.' 'Says hospitalized.' 'There's a video, but I can't watch it.' 'Oh, my gosh, what the actual.' 'I was literally crying on the sidewalk, I had to go home.' 'Everything is just so psychotic and evil.' 'Oh, my gosh. He's dead.' 'I just saw a terrible video. Don't go looking, guys.'

A generation of young people was severely affected by the loss of Charlie Kirk. But the good news is that their lives were also severely affected by Charlie Kirk. A generation lost a man who listened to them, engaged with them and encouraged them, from right and left. Some of his videos when you saw someone who's just there in pain, asking maybe about their gender identity or about an abortion they had, he never responded with anger. He responded with love, he responded by looking them in the eyes and saying, I feel your pain, let's talk about this. That's who he was. He was a man who was murdered because he said, get married, have children, build a legacy, pass down your values, pursue the eternal, seek true joy. What a loss, but what a gift he was while he was here. Thank you.

The SPEAKER: The Chair recognizes the Representative from Carmel, Representative Thorne.

Representative **THORNE**: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Ladies and Gentlemen of the House. We all think about our legacy. What will our legacy be? We think about our legacy in terms of our children, our grandchildren, our families, our friends, our communities. And ironically, we think more about it the older we get, at least I do. I never thought about my legacy when I was 18.

Many people in this country were like Charlie Kirk in a lot of ways. Names like John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, Martin Luther King. People that thought grand, noble thoughts, that they could make the world a better place if they just told people what they believed, if they told people their values, their principles, their faith, that it would spread.

It was mentioned in the resolve, it mentioned by the speaker from Winterport, about Turning Point USA. Since Charlie Kirk's death, Turning Point USA has become Charlie Kirk's legacy. The mission is to build an organized, active and powerful grassroots network on high school and college campuses across this country. They're on over 3,500 high school and college campuses. Turning Point USA is the largest and fastest growing youth organization in America. That makes a point. Turning Point USA guides citizens, young citizens, through development of knowledge, skills, values and motivation, so they can meaningfully engage in their communities to restore traditional American values like patriotism, respect, respect for life, respect for other opinions, respect for other religions, liberty, family, all these words. And he also talked about fiscal responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, Ladies and Gentlemen of the House, this is a legacy worthy of our support. Thank you.

Subsequently, the Joint Resolution was **ADOPTED** and sent for concurrence.

By unanimous consent, all matters having been acted upon were **ORDERED SENT FORTHWITH**.

SENATE PAPERS

The following Joint Order: (S.P. 902)

ORDERED, the House concurring, that when the Senate and House adjourn, they do so until Tuesday, February 24, 2026, at 10:00 in the morning, or until the call of the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House, respectively.

Came from the Senate, **READ** and **PASSED**.

READ and **PASSED** in concurrence.

By unanimous consent, all matters having been acted upon were **ORDERED SENT FORTHWITH**.

The SPEAKER: The Chair recognizes the Representative from Blue Hill, Representative Milliken.

Representative **MILLIKEN**: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request permission to address the House on the record.

The SPEAKER: The Representative from Blue Hill, Representative Milliken, has requested unanimous consent to address the House on the record. Hearing no objection, it is so ordered. The Member may proceed.

Representative **MILLIKEN**: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have an announcement, but I want to start by putting out a trigger warning. I'm going to talk about sexual violence and specifically sexual violence against children.

I rise today as a survivor of sexual violence both as a child and as an adult. Over the past few weeks, as the nation has revisited the Jeffrey Esptein files and the grotesque record of sexual violence committed and enabled by powerful men, many of us who are survivors of child sexual abuse and sexual violence have been deeply and painfully triggered. This is not abstract news to us, it's not political gossip, it's a living memory. And I know that I'm not alone in this Chamber or in this State. Thousands of men and women and children in Maine are feeling this same way. Dozens of people in this room feel it, too. For survivors, coverage like this rips open wounds that never fully heal for us. It reminds us that the harm of sexual violence does not end when the act itself ends, it radiates outward to our families, to our communities and to entire generations. Sexual violence steals years from us. It steals so much from us.

The first time I was raped, I was 12 years old. I looked like some of the girls in the pictures that are in the Epstein files. I'm now 37 years old. For many years, people believed that drugs and alcohol stole the years of my life between the ages of 12 and 30, but that's not the truth. Sexual violence stole those years from me, Mr. Speaker. They stole them from my family and they stole them from my community that loves me. And we don't talk about that enough. We also don't talk enough about why so few women report, about how the

criminal legal system fails women and girls over and over and over and over again; why so few children are believed and why so few survivors ever see anything resembling justice. The system we call the Justice System is for survivors of sexual violence often anything but just. We see it in the Epstein files, we see it in the countless women and girls who came forward and described horrific abuse at the hands of men with money and power and influence and how long it took anyone to listen to them. How many were dismissed, how many were silenced, how many of them watched their abusers continue to freely move through the highest levels of society.

This isn't a partisan issue. I don't care what side of the aisle the offender comes from, accountability must be expected of all men who commit these crimes against children and women. I don't care if the offender is a Democratic Senator from Maine or an embarrassing and destructive current Republican President of the United States. If we cannot collectively say that clearly, out loud, then we are part of the problem. To every woman, every man and every child in this State who has experienced sexual violence and is struggling as they watch this unfold on the nightly news, you're not alone, your pain is real, your reaction is normal and what happened to you was not your fault. You deserved protection, you still deserve justice, you deserve better than what the system has given you.

Today, Mr. Speaker, I proudly celebrate seven years of sustained sobriety from all drugs and alcohol. Recovery is possible, healing is possible. I carry this truth with me every day. Almost every woman that I have ever known who has struggled with chronic substance abuse problems has a history of sexual violence in her past. Sexual violence should not be a private shame, it should be a public failure and it is time that we treat it that way. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The SPEAKER: The Chair recognizes the Representative from York, Representative Sargent.

Representative **SARGENT**: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ask permission to speak on the record.

The SPEAKER: The Representative from York, Representative Sargent, requests unanimous consent to address the House on the record. Hearing no objection, it is so ordered. The Member may proceed.

Representative **SARGENT**: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and Ladies and Gentlemen of the House. I rise today to remind us that this is the birthday of Abraham Lincoln, the 16th President of the United States. Ironically, perhaps a little bit, he's one of perhaps the most illustrious fellow state legislators that we have, as he served for nine years in the Illinois General Assembly. He of course led our nation through the Civil War, he authored the Emancipation Proclamation and he stewarded through the 13th Amendment that abolished slavery. His words are essential building blocks of our American identity.

Mr. Speaker, I will not quote the entire Gettysburg Address this morning. However, I will read the way he chose to end that impactful speech. "The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us, that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion. That we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain and that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the Earth." Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

By unanimous consent, all matters having been acted upon were **ORDERED SENT FORTHWITH**.

On motion of Representative POIRIER of Skowhegan, the House adjourned at 12:21 p.m., until 10:00 a.m., Tuesday, February 24, 2026, or until the call of the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate, respectively, pursuant to the Joint Order (S.P. 902).