

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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VOLUME II

Inaugural Address

OF

BURTON M. CROSS

Governor of Maine

TO THE

NINETY-SIXTH LEGISLATURE

STATE OF MAINE



JANUARY 8, 1953

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BURTON M. CROSS
GOVERNOR OF MAINE

Address

Mr. President and Members of the 96th Legislature:

It has always been my desire to keep government as close to the people as possible. The delicate balance between local and state responsibility should be carefully maintained. During the past eighteen years it has been my privilege to see both sides of this problem, as I have served both in city and state government. As a fellow legislator I have sat with you in this House and in the Senate and have discussed, debated, and participated in much of the forward-looking legislation passed by the last six legislatures. All of this time, a major part of my life has been spent in business and I feel strongly that the businessman's approach to government is not only the ideal to strive for but within certain limitations it can be achieved.

Today, the State of Maine is in excellent financial condition, with a surplus of over six million in the General Fund and two million in the Highway Fund. There is no bonded debt at the General Fund level. It is sound business policy to maintain sufficient of the surplus to insure adequate working capital in both general and highway funds. Recommendations that will be made for expenditures from surplus will not go beyond a safety factor. It is my belief that this Fund should be used for capital improvements or for working capital.

Health and Welfare:

Our Department of Health and Welfare deals essentially with human values and we must realize the heavy strain on this program, a strain placed there by an inflated cost of living. The men and women on Old Age Assistance and Aid to Blind are dependent on the state for the necessities of life; food, clothing, heat and shelter. Sufficient funds are available under present appropriations to raise the maximum grant in these categories from \$50 to \$55 per month. I strongly recommend the emergency passage of a bill to authorize this increase, effective at once. The necessity of meeting this situation without delay cannot be stressed too strongly.

It should also be pointed out that there is one serious gap in our relief planning; that of those unfortunates who are totally disabled and who are not eligible for state assistance under present programs regardless of his or her serious condition. Thirty-nine states and territories now participate in conjunction with the Federal government in monthly grants under this category. I recommend to you that this be included under our present welfare laws. This would relieve towns of a type of welfare much better assumed at state level as Federal and state government would share in the cost as they do in the other relief programs.

I would urgently recommend that you consider the repeal of the present method of State Hospital Aid and replace it with a direct hospital payment plan; a pool plan similar to Blue Cross in its action and covering hospitalization of recipients of Public Assistance and disabled individuals. The same amount of state dollars as are now spent on Hospital Aid would cover both the above programs as in addition, \$750,000 Federal funds would be available to match state dollars, giving the hospitals more total dollars and bringing the whole program of tax money under the careful screening of a state or municipal welfare agency. Either this plan should be accepted or a financial responsibility of relatives clause inserted in the existing law to protect the present Hospital Aid program from abuse.

State Institutions:

The mounting cost of living and the rising tide of inmate population has struck heavily at our state institutions, pushing regular budgets to an all-time high. It necessitates our being required to scan every activity in each institution both as to per capita cost and as to the basic fundamental purpose of its inception. Some may appear to be outmoded as to purpose and economically unsound. If so, we should consolidate or eliminate these activities. Details will be discussed in the Budget Message next week.

At that time, a building program will be presented to you to relieve crowded conditions at the Augusta State Hospital and other institutions, and a program to modernize and repair existing facilities in this field of government. Here again keep in mind that this department covers a field of human suffering which is an inescapable responsibility of state government. Every effort must be explored toward cure rather than custodial care. Our goal should be to place back in useful industry and society all who can possibly be helped under this program.

State School for Deaf:

There is a great deal of concern over the conditions at the State School for the Deaf in Portland. The buildings are obsolete, a distinct fire hazard, and facilities are greatly inadequate to handle the pressure of a mounting enrollment in this field. I recommend strongly two major changes in regard to this institution: First, that its administration be transferred to the Department of Education as this is an educational not a welfare problem; second, that a new site, more suitable for a school of this type, be set up outside the city where conditions will be more in line with proper educational procedure.

Education:

In the field of education we must use a threefold attack to solve the basic problems of teachers' pay, teachers' training, and continued state aid to towns and cities. The State should lead the way in setting standards of teachers' pay, based on ability, training, and years of experience. I also recommend that state tuition of Maine students at our teacher colleges be cut in half to encourage greater enrollment of potential teachers and that facilities at our teacher colleges be modernized and improved to offer a greater variety of opportunity in teacher preparation. A continuation of the Maine School Building Authority program will do much to improve the physical structure of our public schools and this in itself will help to attract and to hold teachers within our state.

The 95th Legislature authorized the removal of the Vocational Training School from Augusta to Portland, where the facilities are much broader and where many more students can be adequately taken care of. This program is of primary importance to Maine, its industry, and its citizens, and should be continued and enlarged as rapidly as the dollars can be found to implement it.

State Employees:

If we want continued efficient, honest, conscientious state employees, we must see to it that our personnel rates and working conditions are such as to keep and attract only the best to state service. In line with this I recommend that a one-step increase in employees' salaries be granted, retroactive to January 1, 1953 and that the schedule of state department heads' salaries be re-examined and revised to bring these men and women

more nearly in line with private enterprise. Along these same lines I recommend that compensation for members of the Legislature be increased. Maine is one of the lowest pay states in the remuneration of its law makers and a personal financial sacrifice must be made by its Legislators in attending a session of the Legislature.

State Office Building :

I must point out to you the obvious necessity of correcting the intolerable and crowded working conditions in and around the State Capitol. As it now exists, it is impossible to attain top efficiency of operation or to properly coordinate state departmental activity. I am confident that a properly planned office building will repay its cost many times over in added efficiency and convenience to the tax paying public. Much valuable time is wasted by citizens attempting to locate state departments scattered all over the capital city. I urge your study of this major problem of government.

Development of Our Natural Resources:

Maine stands on the threshold of a terrific development expansion of our mineral and other natural resources. A great challenge faces our Development Commission in properly exploiting this situation. Maine is surely on the march in every feature of our economy. Our last year's recreational business was at a new high. Our industrial expansion has been steady and sound. No Maine industry has yet been lost to other states. Over one billion dollars in manufactured products was produced in Maine last year. We must meet the competition of other states and their selling programs. I strongly recommend an expansion of activity and a new alignment of our Development Commission and its program. I have set up in the budget additional dollars to implement this need.

Park and Picnic Areas:

As to our public parks, the best proof of the demand from the public for public parks and camping areas has been the heavy use of existing facilities by Maine citizens as well as out-of-state visitors. I urge continuation of the present progressive program and will present financial details in the budget message.

Agriculture:

A great expansion and diversification of our agricultural productivity has occurred in recent years and has produced many new phases of production. The University of Maine, the Extension Program, and the Department of Agriculture are striving to promote new ways of raising and selling our fine Maine products. Increased concentration on new canning and freezing plants throughout the state will still further promote this activity. One of our greatest needs is the continuation of a sound highway planning program keyed to the rural areas of our agricultural state in order to move our products more quickly to market. Higher standards of packaging and grading should be enforced in order to keep the prestige and quality of Maine products.

Sea and Shore Fisheries:

The marine farming of our coastal area has been the lifeblood of this state for many years. The dollar volume of all our fisheries' products has increased tremendously during the past few years. New and pressing problems make imperative a greater emphasis on research and development in this field. From a practical standpoint I strongly recommend the consolidation of many of the existing licenses to promote uniformity and for the greater convenience of those who make their livelihood from the sea.

Fish and Game Program and Pollution:

For many years Maine has stood as the acme of fishing and hunting and our Fish and Game Department has done much to protect and promote this phase of our state. One great danger to this natural resource is stream, river and lake pollution. This ever increasing menace to our water resources must be met on a carefully considered and long-range plan. A start toward testing and classification of our entire watershed was authorized by the last Legislature. A continuation of this program is essential for sound progress. Until we know the full story as it exists, we cannot intelligently plan ahead. Our present laws or any future ones in regard to elimination of pollution must be weighed carefully to protect all the interests of all the people of Maine.

Labor Department :

The record of Labor and Industry in the State of Maine is one of which we may justly be proud. We, here in Maine, have never overlooked the importance of collective bargaining and the attitude of cooperative round-table discussion. Industry in Maine is to be commended for its steady growth and stable condition. The state must do all it can in the fields of research and promotion to help maintain and develop our industry and serve it in every way we can. In my recommendations on the Development Commission there are provisions for an enlargement of this very valuable program. We not only want new industry but we want to become the best possible site for those already here. In fact, we must continue to keep a favorable climate for our industry to promote its growth and expansion. With the full cooperation of the State, Labor, and Industry, Maine can face the future with confidence in this field and provide enough jobs and a high enough standard of living to attract our young men and women and keep them here in Maine.

In the light of inflated cost of living we must re-examine realistically the present weekly benefits and number of weeks' pay under both workmen's and unemployment compensation. I urge legislation to promote greater industrial safety and to revise the present death benefit schedule for accidental death or injury under our workmen's compensation law.

Sales Tax :

The Sales Tax has proven to be a sound and stable source of state income and has provided relief to the towns and cities of real estate taxation at the state level. There appears to be no necessity to change the basic 2% rate at this time. Several features appear to require adjustment in order to correct inequities and to better administration. I recommend three basic amendments: (1) To collect the tax on the net purchase price on automotive and farm vehicles. (2) A careful analysis of the bracket system to determine if it should need adjustment to better balance collection on small sales. (3) To pay to the merchants a fee for collection and filing returns.

Liquor Commission :

Much has happened in the last two years to bring the Liquor Commission under the spotlight of adverse public opinion and publicity. I

am firmly convinced that the people of Maine demand a strong approach to the problem in order to restore public confidence in the integrity of government. I assure you and the people of our state that every effort to accomplish this fact shall be made. With your help and cooperation it can be done.

After long and careful study of the department and the laws pertaining to its administration, it is quite evident that too many powers by law and regulation now rest solely in the hands of an administrative commission. This would not be corrected, in my opinion, by further concentrating it in the hands of one commissioner; rather, would I strongly recommend the following divisions of responsibility and authority: First, establish the commission as a board to control listings, engage in policy making and act as an appeals board. Second, place responsibility for all purchases and sales in the hands of a competent business manager or administrator. Protect him from political pressure and pay him a sufficient amount to obtain an outstanding man. Third, place all licensing and enforcement under a division absolutely separate in fact and intent; the duties of this division, the granting of all licenses, hearings on revocations or suspensions, and general enforcement of law and regulations. Appeals could then be made from any decisions of this Bureau to the Commission, thus keeping the commissioners on a high quasi-judicial plane, removed from all details of purchases, sales and enforcement, yet holding the balance of decision at the policy level. I am confident that with such a division of power, with these checks and balances, we will find that this department can be operated efficiently and well, that honesty, efficiency, and integrity by the Commission and its employees will be recognized and that public confidence will be restored.

I further recommend that all liquor concerns selling to the state furnish a list of all officers and directors of their corporations, also designating a salesman, if operating within the state. These salesmen should be licensed and that license be revoked for any of the following reasons: Political contributions to a candidate for state office; spending of money or political activity in behalf of any candidate for public office in state government; gifts to any employee of the Liquor Commission; or any other act which would appear to influence in any way the Commission or its employees. It should be emphasized that quality of product and public acceptance, not political favoritism, should be the yardstick used in listing and purchasing liquor.

Highways and Bridges:

Now, there is another major problem facing this Legislature. The 30 million dollar budget of the Highway Department this year reflects the heavy demand of road building and maintenance. The 95th Legislature authorized the Highway Commission to enlist the aid of the Automotive Safety Foundation. I have carefully examined their initial report, the yardstick used, and the facts and conclusions presented, and consider them to be of far reaching importance to our state and its traveling public. Let me stress that this report is completely unbiased, without fear or favor, political or sectional favoritism, and should be considered on this fact-finding basis. I strongly recommend to you that we accept and translate into legislation the major outlines and specifications of the report, especially that relating to our classifications of federal aid, state, and state-aid highways. I am firmly convinced that such a move will be in the best interests of the people of Maine. It is quite evident from this report that our highway statutes have been basically sound but certain features of these laws present loopholes and opportunity for political pressures and political favoritism. As our laws are now written, they place tremendous power of decision solely in the hands of the Highway Commission. This complete responsibility of decision places embarrassing pressures on the Highway Commission which should be eased or removed. I recommend similar definite division of power as I have in the Liquor Commission. Place the Highway Commission on a policy-making, fact-finding, and review board basis. Place administration, contractual activity, budget and fiscal problems under a business manager or chief highway administrator. Leave all engineering, designing and details of construction under the chief engineer and you should have three harmonious groupings of responsibility in the hands of specialists in each field. Pay the business manager adequately. Protect him from political pressure and we will receive many more miles of road for our tax dollar. We cannot continue to operate this department with the Highway Commission constantly under political bombardment for special privileges as they are now, for example, under the Betterment Program. I know full well, and commend the efforts made by the present Commission to protect and spend this appropriation carefully and wisely, but the fact remains that it is an outstanding example of pressure politics far beyond its original intent. With the present accelerated program of construction there is no further need of this being a program within a program and I strongly recommend that the Betterment Fund of one million be merged with the accelerated construction plan.

I would not be consistent with my past legislative record of highway planning if I did not strongly urge this Legislature to eliminate completely the practice of legislative road resolves or pork barrel so-called. It is a relic of the past, outmoded, and a complete duplication of some existing programs. It has no part in a system of modern highway and fiscal planning. I recommend its elimination and the allocation of the same amount, plus other dollars, into the town road improvement fund, where as you all know, the towns will benefit on a completely fair, just and equitable mileage basis. I am confident that we can build many more miles of passable roads under such a program. Let us face facts realistically and in the interests of all the people of Maine and not a favored few.

Economy :

It is very evident from the foregoing recommendations that this Legislature and this administration must exert every effort humanly possible to exercise a sound but not shortsighted economy in all its efforts in behalf of the taxpayers of this state. The programs which I have placed before you indicate a slower but continued rise of inflation. Every method will be used on my part to carefully examine every phase of administration to see if better business methods, streamlining of activities, and possible consolidation within departments may offset this growing trend. Maine's record of sound government, balanced budgets, and the minimum of debt, is one which we must preserve if we preserve the stability of our state and its people.

Conclusion :

I have offered you these suggestions, these recommendations for your consideration. They are offered sincerely and from the experience of twelve years of study of our Maine government. It is my belief that they are sound and in the public interest. I assure you that you will have my complete cooperation in your endeavors to legislate for the people of our state. Please call on me if my help in solving your problems can be of benefit. I will be available to you at any time.

It is my firm belief that this Legislature faces, as has no other, a challenge and a duty to our Maine citizens. A challenge to restore to the people of this state, faith in the honesty and integrity of its public officials and a duty to see that the people are kept informed of every activity of their government. Only by public education and an honest, open door

policy, can we keep faith and confidence with our citizens. I pledge to you and the people of Maine that I shall do everything in my power to accomplish these things. I shall need your help and your cooperation. Let us set aside partisan or petty politics and work together for the good of Maine and its people. Remember that every problem has a solution if we but look for it. I know that with God's help and the help of the people of Maine, we will be able to meet this challenge, solve the problems, and go forward to a finer and a better state.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul LePage". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with large, connected letters.

Governor of Maine