

# MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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JOHN R. MCKERNAN, JR.  
GOVERNOR

April, 1993

Dear Fellow State Employees:

Our state employee morale task force has recently completed a report to me on morale issues. The report includes their recommendations for improving employee morale.

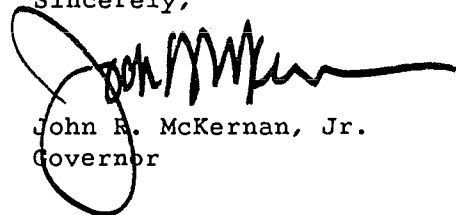
The task force has done an excellent job and I would like to take this opportunity to share with you the report they have provided for my consideration and action as appropriate. A copy of the report is attached for your information.

In the coming months, I will do my best to address the areas that are within my control and ask that the task force continue to assess your concerns and offer recommendations for improvement. I value your ideas; therefore, if you have any additional concerns or recommendations please contact your department head or your task force representative.

I recognize that we are facing difficult times and that not all concerns can be addressed in as positive a way as we would like. Nonetheless, I feel it is very important to at least make the effort to make improvements wherever possible.

Thanks again for all you do.

Sincerely,



John R. McKernan, Jr.  
Governor



JUN 7 1993

## REPORT TO THE GOVERNOR

### TASK FORCE ON EMPLOYEE MORALE

#### MISSION

The mission of the Task Force is to examine employee morale issues, consider alternative management processes which can be implemented to enhance employee morale and present recommendations to the Governor.

#### BACKGROUND

The Task Force on Employee Morale was established on September 3, 1992, with representation from each state department and agency. Since September, the Task Force has met biweekly to identify possible causes of poor employee morale. Individual members have also opened channels of communication on the issue of employee morale within their own agencies to solicit ideas and formulate a working agenda. On December 10, 1992, the Task Force was invited to a working lunch with Governor John R. McKernan, Jr. This provided an open forum for a candid discussion of our work to date. The immediate response by the Governor to schedule visits to employees of each department is noteworthy and reflects an understanding of the need for improved communication. Additionally, biweekly mailings to employees with paychecks has opened another channel of communications. As a result of this process, we have arrived at principal recommendations.

#### ROOT CAUSES

Employees feel unappreciated. The unpaid furlough and shutdown days; reduced work week; perceived attacks by the Administration, Legislature, press and public; temporary actions which fail to solve the budget problem; inadequate internal communication; and, a perception that the Administration's vision is not shared with all state workers, combine to create the impression that the workers are not valued.

The Task Force initially identified root causes of low morale. Several work sessions were devoted to distilling a working list down to seven root causes. It is these seven which the Task Force feels are the most important to the greatest number of state employees. All of them are addressed in this report in the recommendations section.

1. **Lack of Communication.** Key information does not flow from the Administration to state workers. There does not appear to be any coordinated effort to insure timely communication of information to state workers in times of crisis. Employees usually learn from the rumor mill and the media before or instead of hearing the official word through the chain of command.

2. **More Demands With Fewer Resources.** Across-the-board cuts in resources have affected services. The workload has not decreased, and in fact, has increased. Loss of resources has meant drastic reduction or elimination of training and technological improvements. One result has been a noticeable erosion of cooperation among state agencies. A reduction in capital expenditures has had an adverse affect on the physical environment in which state employees work. There is an expectation on the part of the Legislature, the public and the Administration that quality services will continue to be provided at the same level.

3. **Lack of Leadership.** Inadequate communication of the vision to department and agency heads is a barrier to the establishment of priorities. This has led to a general feeling of confusion, anxiety, apathy and low self-worth among state employees, who perceive no logic or overall plan in decisions and proposals made by the Administration and the Legislature.

4. **Diminished Job Security.** Lack of job security, in light of layoffs, changes to benefit and retirement plans, contributes to instability, insecurity and lower productivity. In the past, workers were attracted to state government because of job security, benefits and dedication to public service, even if it meant being paid somewhat less than in the private sector.

5. **39-Hour Work Week.** This action has had an uneven impact on the state's workforce, financially hitting the lowest paid employees the hardest. Salaried workers feel the 39-hour work week is insulting, since their work week often exceeds 40 hours. The limitation creates an administrative burden on agencies and, we are told, is inconsistently applied among state agencies.

6. **Uncertainty About The Future.** Budget problems have not been solved. Temporary solutions and a multitude of proposed alternatives create anxiety among state workers. Workers are threatened both with the possibility of finding themselves unemployed, either by staff reduction or privatization, and having programs to which they are ideologically committed changed or eliminated.

7. **Fairness.** With the imposition of furlough and shutdown days, the 39-hour work week, staff reductions, benefit cuts and freezes in merit pay, executive branch state employees feel they have borne the brunt of addressing the state's fiscal problems. While other programs and constituencies have had budgets frozen, the employees have experienced significant cuts.

These employees report being treated by the Administration, Legislature, and public as though they are the cause of the state's financial woes. They are cast as incompetent, unworthy of respect and unresponsive to the public.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Improve Communication.** The Cabinet should devote the same energy and attention to communicating with state workers as is spent on the Legislature, public and press. Explore designating an individual to coordinate communications with employees to ensure the timely and consistent flow of information. Provide opportunities for employee input on major issues that impact their work and well-being. Include visits to state offices in the itinerary for Capital For A Day.

2. **Set Priorities and Make the Hard Choices.** Now is the time to prioritize programs. State workers should be involved in this effort. Through this process, programs assigned the lowest priority would be targeted for cuts or elimination. Adequate funding levels should be restored for those given the highest priority. Provide sufficient training and resources to make the remaining programs efficient and effective. Communicate with constituencies to set realistic expectations about the level of services the state intends to provide.

3. **Provide Vision and Leadership.** Develop a vision statement of how state government will function. The Governor, as team leader, should convey this vision through direct communication with employees. Increased emphasis should be placed on development of management and leadership skills in the Cabinet and at agency levels. Use programs such as Total Quality Management to create an environment in which employees are empowered to implement the vision. Management team and Maine Executive Institute activities should be shared with all state employees.

4. **Recognize the Contributions of Employees.** Create employee recognition programs to salute the performance of individuals and teams. Review the pay and benefits package to ensure it will both attract and retain a quality state workforce. Modify the existing job classification system to provide flexible career development for workers and improve the utilization of human resources.

5. **39-Hour Work Week.** The Task Force has no recommendation on the 39-hour work week. However, further changes to employee compensation and work week should take into consideration the likely impact on employee morale.

6. **Reduce the Workforce in a More Humane Way.** Provide more consistent transition and placement services to workers who are laid off. Re-examine the existing bumping system, recognizing its adverse impact on morale.

7. **Address False Perceptions That Impact Morale.** Continue initiatives that counter the perception that state employees are the cause of the state's problems. Ensure that budget cuts are consistent with the established priorities.

STATE EMPLOYEE MORALE TASK FORCE MEMBERS

Major General Nelson E. Durgin - Chairman, Def. & Vet. Services

Bruce Inch - Administrative & Financial Services

Rod McCormick - Agriculture

Will Harris - Conservation

Tom Meiser - Corrections

Roland Lapointe - Defense & Veterans Services

Shelley Lane - Economic & Community Development

Al York - Education

Arthur Walsh/George Viles - Environmental Protection

Andrea Murphy - Governor's Office

Freda Plumley - Human Services

Bill Vernon - Inland Fisheries & Wildlife

Louise Salminen - Labor

Rick Record - Marine Resources

Nancy Warburton Desisto - Mental Health & Mental Retardation

Alice Knapp - Professional & Financial Regulations

Dennis Lunstead/Stephen Dodge - Public Safety

Douglas McCobb - Transportation

David Blocher - Waste Management Agency

4/5/93