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Office of Governor Paul LePage

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January 7, 2015

2015 Inaugural Address of Governor Paul R. LePage

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, Members of the 127th Legislature and honored guests. Welcome.

First, I must thank Ann and my children for their love and support during the last four years and particularly through the recent campaign, which was very negative. I'm so proud of their strength and resilience through it all.

I'm especially proud of Ann, who has dedicated so much to the veterans of our state over the past four years.

However, I hope she doesn't jump out of any more planes! Je dois aussi remercier mon collègue Franco Americans pour leur soutien. Je suis un enfant des rues du petit Canada, je n'ai jamais imaginé qu'un jour, je deviendrais votre gouverneur.

Mais vous prendre en charge, nous l'avons fait.

J'ai jamais oublier je venais, et je n'oublierai jamais votre soutien indéfectible. Merci beaucoup mais aimée.

Well, folks, we're back. The national experts and the media said we wouldn't be here today. They forgot to ask those who matter most: the Maine people.

Pundits and pollsters don't determine why a person should be Governor. The people do.

For four years, we have been taking our message directly to the people of Maine. We let our actions speak for themselves.

That's what the people want: action. They are so tired of politicians preaching to the people and not listening to the people. They promise one thing, then do another.

That's not who we are.

We said we were going to pay the hospitals, and we did. We paid hospitals \$750 million in welfare debt.

We said we were going to lower taxes, and we did. We passed the largest tax cut in Maine's history.

We said we were going to help private businesses create jobs, and we did. State government is no longer an adversary against business, but a partner with the private sector.

We made Maine "Open for Business."

Private-sector companies have created more than 20,000 jobs. And there are almost 7,000 jobs at the CareerCenter that still need to be filled.

If you want a job, you can get it. But our work is far from complete!

WELFARE REFORM Most importantly, we said we were going to reform welfare, and we are.

So far, we have cut the welfare rolls in half. We stopped the growth of Medicaid.

We went after fraud and abuse. We put photos on EBT cards. We put more money toward nursing homes.

We are using the savings from our welfare reforms to take care of our elderly, disabled and mentally ill.

We are transitioning people off welfare and into productive jobs. The Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Labor and Veterans Services have teamed up to create an innovative program called "Welfare to Work."

More than 1,200 Mainers who were on welfare are now working full-time.

No more welfare handouts.

We will give them skills, training and jobs. We want them to know prosperity, not poverty.

We are making progress in reforming our welfare system. But we are just getting started.

MAKING MAINE COMPETITIVE The people of Maine told us they want us to keep reforming government. They want better jobs.

They want welfare reform. They want lower energy costs. They want lower taxes.

They want good roads and bridges, and they want a smaller, more affordable government.

Mainers work hard. They have common sense. They know what it means to pay the bills. They want their piece of the American Dream.

We won't rest until every man, woman and child in Maine gets their chance to achieve prosperity, not poverty.

Mainers deserve career jobs with higher pay and good benefits. We must attract new business to Maine and help our existing companies to grow and expand.

We don't have to reinvent the wheel. Other states are growing and expanding. We can do what they are doing. We can make Maine competitive.

TAX REFORM States with the fastest growth have the lowest tax burdens and the lowest energy costs. That's not a coincidence.

We need good-paying jobs that encourage young people and families to stay in Maine. To create these jobs, Maine must be competitive with other states.

Companies want to come to low-tax states, and so do young families. Once they get here, we must keep them here. We want families, retirees and wealthy residents to stay in Maine.

We lose them to other states because we tax them too much. When we lower the income tax burden—and we will—we put money back in your pocket. You earned it, you should keep it.

My long-term vision is a Maine without any income tax. We will start by getting rid of the estate tax and income tax on pensions.

Small Maine companies cannot afford to transfer the business to the family because the estate taxes are so high. Small, family-owned businesses are the backbone of our economy.

We must keep our small businesses alive and well. We must keep our families in Maine.

We must also keep our retirees in Maine. Too many Maine retirees have moved to other states to avoid our high taxes. Let's work together to keep them here. More importantly, let's work together to keep their assets here as well.

ENERGY COSTS Business owners from all over the state tell me the same thing: energy costs are too high.

If you think your household electric bill is high, just imagine how much it costs to build a destroyer at BIW or make paper at a mill in Hinckley.

Lower energy costs are absolutely critical to attracting major employers, manufacturers and high-tech industries. We're off to a good start.

We brought natural gas infrastructure to Maine. But we need an adequate supply of natural gas.

Massachusetts now has a governor who wants to work with us. We are already talking with him about increasing natural gas supply to our region.

We need it here as soon as possible so we can help all Mainers.

We need a Public Utilities Commission that concentrates on affordable energy for all Mainers, not just rich, subsidized investors and environmentalists.

I am open to any form of energy that lowers the cost of electricity. But we can't wait 15 or 20 years. We need affordable energy, and we need it now.

We must lift the 100 megawatt cap on all energy sources. We must lower the costs of heating our homes and our businesses. Our rebates and loan programs are driving down heating costs.

But we need to allow open competition.

Nearly 10,000 heat pumps have been installed in Maine. That saves on heating costs and improves energy efficiency. It puts money back in your pockets.

Businesses want lower energy costs, and homeowners need lower heating costs.

Let's give the people what they want.

REDUCING THE SIZE OF GOVERNMENT The people of Maine want an affordable, innovative and flexible government. The size and cost of state government should support—not burden—hard-working families.

We have started to right-size government, but there is still more to do. It is time to eliminate obsolete regulations and poor customer service.

You, the Maine people, are the customers, and state employees are your public servants.

We must have a cost-effective and efficient government that is responsive to the needs of our citizens and our businesses.

A government that is too big and too expensive takes resources away from Mainers and discourages job creation.

We need to be bold. We need to think outside of Maine's traditional model of government.

Mainers are tired of paying for a government that doesn't deliver quality services or competitive schools.

We have made progress on the state level. We have taken the politics out of improving infrastructure. Projects are now prioritized by professionals, not politicians.

Infrastructure projects that speed economic development or help businesses get goods to market are the highest priority. Projects based on political promises get left by the roadside.

It's time to do this at all levels of government. Yes, we must work together, but we must work smarter.

Efforts to consolidate jails in Maine have failed. The attempt to consolidate our schools has failed.

School budgets are rising every year. Maine has twice the number of administrators as the national average. But student enrollment continues to drop—and so does their competitiveness in the fast-growing technical world.

School administrators take home six-digit salaries, while our teachers dig into their own pockets to buy classroom supplies. That's just simply wrong.

Our education system is upside down. It has two winners and two losers. Administrators and union bosses are the winners. The two big losers are teachers and our students.

We must get our education budgets under control. We must put the money where it belongs: in the classroom. If we really want achieve the state's mandate to pay 55 percent of local school costs, we could initiate a statewide teachers' contract.

We must also get our local budgets under control. Total spending on local government has increased by half-a-billion dollars over the past five years, during the worst recession since the Great Depression.

This kind of spending is unacceptable. Mainers cannot afford it. Municipalities blame cuts at the state level, but they ignore that they are duplicating services. This has to stop.

Cities, towns and counties must work together to provide key services. Local control is great, but no one wants to pay for it. We will never be competitive until we learn to share services by working together.

It can be done. In Washington County, 18 municipalities have created a shared EMS system. This regional service has saved hundreds of thousands of dollars a year.

In Waldo County, several communities have contracted with the City of Belfast to provide fire protection.

State government should reward these efforts. The state should be helping these communities to reduce cost without decreasing services. If we want to improve services and reduce costs, we must have the courage to work together and do it right.

KEEPING MAINERS SAFE Mainers deserve to be kept safe. We will focus on fighting drug crimes. Unlike the 126th Legislature, the 127th must prevent young Mainers from getting addicted. We must make sure no more babies are born addicted to drugs. We must focus on the drug epidemic.

We will continue to raise awareness and campaign against domestic violence.

Whether it comes from national sports stars or the streets of Maine, there is no excuse for domestic violence.

Men must step up and speak out against this heinous crime that traumatizes women, children and families.

When it comes to keeping Mainers safe, we can't move fast enough.

To the Maine people, we say this: we listened to you, and we hear your concerns.

We just hope the legislature is also listening to you. The election sent us all a clear message: Mainers want action.

We must work together. My door is always open to anyone—anyone—who brings innovative solutions that will help move Maine forward.

But be warned. I am not here to play political games. We are here to work—to work hard for the people of Maine. We are here to bring prosperity, not poverty.

Actions speak louder than words. Let's get to work.

Thank you.