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The 39th Adjutant General of Maine Annual Address to the 127th Legislature 2015

Maine Army National Guard

Maine Department of Defense, Veterans and Emergency Management

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The 39th Adjutant General of Maine
Annual address to the 127th Legislature

President Thibodeau, Speaker Eves, and members of the 127th Legislature, thank you for inviting me back again to address you with an update on the Department of Defense, Veterans and Emergency Management. It has been a busy and productive year for the Department, with some challenges and with, yet again, a strong record of great successes. As I have said before in this forum and many others, the strengths of this department lie principally in the truly extraordinary men and women who make up your Maine National Guard, Emergency Management Agency, Bureau of Veterans Services, and the Maine Military Authority. I find all of them an inspiration to me as we work together to ensure that the mission of the Department is accomplished – to provide trained and ready military forces as the primary Combat Reserve of the Army and Air Force, to protect the lives and property of our citizens in the event of man-made or natural disasters, to care, advocate for and ensure the dignity of our veterans and their families, and to continue providing world-class equipment rebuild capabilities for state, federal and other partners. We have a relatively small but very professional and committed group of state employees who help accomplish these tasks, doing everything from dam inspections and veterans' claims services, to facilities management and security duty. We simply could not do what we are required to do as a Department without these very important people, all of whom are integral to whatever success we may have. Our state employee of the year this year is Ms. Rebecca Maheux, who has worked in the Commissioner's office for 15 years, and is a key member of our team – please join me in recognizing her for her hard work and dedication.

When I addressed the legislature last year I began with a summary of the major challenges we face in the Army National Guard due principally to national budget pressures and decisions being made regarding the size, structure and roles of the three components of the Army. I will not repeat here today what I said then and have many times since about these issues. What I will do however, is once again ask for your continued support in advocating however and wherever you can to ensure that the state and nation's National Guard, which is now the best trained, best led, best equipped and most ready it may ever have been in its long history since 1636, remains a strong, modern, relevant and fully integrated part of the country's overall defense. In the coming year as Congress and other national leadership debate the questions of balance between the Army's active and reserve components, and the necessary size and resource levels of the military, it is absolutely critical that they hear from all of the stakeholders in these decisions – the most important of whom are the governors, elected representatives, and our citizens. I want to publicly thank Governor LePage and our Congressional Delegation for all of their efforts in this area, and thank all of you for your continued support for the Guard both here in the Legislature and elsewhere.

Almost eleven years ago, the Maine Bureau of Veterans Services had appointed a new director, a man with much experience in the military and in civilian business. He took over a bureau which was working hard to cope with shrinking budgets, an antiquated structure, and a set of demands which were rapidly growing in both scope and

complexity. He was charged with serving a population of veterans and their families which is the second largest in the nation by percentage, and which ranges in age from men and women who served in World War II, Korea and Vietnam, to the younger veterans of our current wars, with all of the disparate needs and concerns which flow from such a diverse group of people. He and his small staff dove into this work, and in these past eleven years, Mr. Peter Ogden has worked with a level of energy and commitment which many of us still find astonishing – and he has made the Bureau into one of the most outstanding examples of success we have in state government. He has expanded our state veterans cemetery system and made it one of the best in the country, he has established a comprehensive program of recognition for all of our veterans and ensured that from the biggest cities to the smallest towns in the state, regardless of time, distance or other factors, these men and women are given the recognition, awards, dignity and thanks they have earned from all of us. Mr. Ogden has developed and sustained a superb working partnership with the Federal Veterans Administration, building relationships at Togus and in Washington which have made our state's combined state and federal veterans' programs national leaders. He and the Bureau have worked to secure millions upon millions of dollars of earned federal benefits and medical care for thousands of veterans and family members, and in the process has saved the state money and other resources which can now be applied elsewhere. The several plaques which grace the Hall of Flags in this building, recognizing our men and women who have served, are in a sense also a form of recognition for Pete Ogden, given his untiring dedication to his important work and the

fact that it was due to his efforts and those many others who worked with him to place those plaques in the Hall.

Mr. Pete Ogden will be moving into well-deserved retirement at the end of this legislative session, after serving the state and nation for virtually all of his adult life. Our comment in the Department for years has been that when Pete finally steps down, it will take three people to replace him. There is legislation moving through this body now which will effectively do just that, and I hope that with your support we can continue the work to which Pete has dedicated himself for so many years, by proceeding with the modernization and improvement of the Bureau so that this powerful legacy of service to our deserving Veterans can remain one of the strengths of our state. Please join me in recognizing Mr. Ogden, who is sitting in the gallery today.

I am also pleased to introduce to you today Mr. Ogden's replacement, Ms. Adria Horn, who will be starting at the Bureau in a few weeks. She is a highly accomplished woman, a decorated Major in the US Army Reserve with five operational deployments, and we are very pleased to welcome her to the Department. Please stand Ms. Horn so we can recognize you...

Ms. Horn will be taking on the challenge of maintaining the momentum of the Bureau, while continuing to adapt to our changing circumstances and requirements, and we are absolutely certain that she is more than up to the task. I look forward to working with her and with all of you to ensure that our efforts are successful.

The Maine Emergency Management Agency, under the leadership of Mr. Bruce Fitzgerald, remains at the core of state government's mission to protect and serve our citizens. The Agency has, along with the rest of us, weathered this winter, coordinating efforts to get federal support to towns and counties who have been affected, and MEMA continues to work with the federal government to underscore the full impact of this winter's extreme snowfall in many areas of the state, and to provide federal assistance if possible. The agency also led the process for us to send National Guard support to Massachusetts, in February. We have not needed National Guard support here in Maine during the winter since 1998, and so I was able to say to my counterpart in Massachusetts that what they call a "snow emergency," we up here just call another winter day...

We are, however, concerned about the continued cold conditions around the state, and what that may potentially mean for thawing streams and rivers and snow runoff when temperatures do warm up. The team at MEMA is working with other state and federal agencies to monitor this situation and will remain engaged as things progress this spring.

Among the exercises, training and plans with which the professionals at MEMA are engaged, one of the most critical emerging areas is that of responding to an event where the state's computer networks and information technology infrastructure is

attacked. During this past year MEMA has worked closely with partners in the state Office of Information Technology, the Maine State Police, the University of Maine System, and the National Guard to develop plans and protocols to address such an incident. We have hosted training and countless meetings to discuss and refine our processes, and this work is ongoing. We still have much to do – defining legal authorities, and developing relationships with the private sector who own and control much of our critical IT infrastructure are just two of the most important areas we need to address. We will continue to work on this growing area of concern, and again, with your assistance, we will continue to make progress.

MEMA has, like much of the rest of the Department, struggled lately with federal budget pressures – the recent uncertainty in funding for the Department of Homeland Security may have potentially affected the majority of MEMA's budget, as well as the agency's ability to pass through grant funds to our counties and towns, and to our law enforcement agencies. The legislature has been very supportive in the past in helping us meet the needs of the agency in these kinds of circumstances, and we hope that your support will not be needed again this year.

The Maine Military Authority has also been severely affected by reductions in Federal funding, to the extent that after this fiscal year we anticipate that federal resources at the Authority will be reduced to virtually nothing. However, Tim Corbett and his team have been diligent in developing programs and contracts with other partners in order to

ensure that our facilities remain open and engaged in the kind of high-quality work for which they are so well known. They are currently executing a multi-year contract to fully rebuild large, articulated mass transit busses for the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority, and they are developing several other initiatives to sustain and potentially grow their operations in Limestone. With diversification of effort we anticipate that the Authority will weather the federal budget problems and emerge strong and competitive.

The largest part of the Department is, of course, the Maine Air and Army National Guard, composed of roughly 3500 men and women in units and facilities across the state, who remain true to Maine's proud legacy of military excellence. As has been the case for much of the past twenty-five years, the year since I last addressed this body has been a busy one for Maine's military forces. We are pleased that there is an ongoing effort in the Legislature to provide state tuition assistance to our Guard members – such a program will assist us not only with recruiting and retention, but will ensure that our Guard is educated and technically competent, and that we are providing incentives for our best and brightest young people to remain here in the state. We look forward to working with you on this initiative.

The Maine Air National Guard, the "Maineiacs," have had yet another incredible year. The Maine Air Guard, commanded by Brigadier General Gerard Bolduc of Bangor, with Brigadier General John D'Errico as the Chief of Staff and Command Chief Master Sergeant Robert Peer as the Senior Enlisted Leader, is made up of the 101st Air

Refueling Wing in Bangor, the 265th Combat Communications Squadron and the 243rd Engineering Installation Squadron in South Portland. These units have deployed Airmen and equipment to multiple locations around the world, and have consistently maintained their global reputation for excellence.

Last spring the 101st in Bangor underwent their periodic Air Force-directed operational readiness inspection, in circumstances which might have made another unit less confident of success. These inspections involve meticulous observation and review of an Air Wing's operations and organization, and require intensive training and preparation in order to ensure that very exacting standards are met. The Wing had originally been scheduled for their inspection in the fall of 2013, but the event was cancelled due to the federal government shutdown. It was rescheduled for the spring of 2014, following a busy winter of deployments, including the 4 month deployment of the wing Commander, Colonel Doug Farnham, to the Middle East to act as the Deputy Director of Mobility Forces for US Central Command. Shortly after the commander's return, the unit underwent its inspection, and aced it. They were rated Excellent, a level of achievement all the more notable due to the circumstances surrounding the event. Those of us who are familiar with the 101st Air Refueling Wing, the most active Air National Guard unit of its kind in the country, and one of the most critical refueling Wings in the entire Air Force, were not surprised at this outcome.

Between October 2014 and January 2015, the Wing had six jets with 115 crew members and maintenance personnel forward deployed in the Middle East on a rotational basis supporting air operations against the self-styled “Islamic State.” They remain fully engaged in their other mission sets as well, flying regular sorties for air defense alert, and supporting military aircraft from the US and partner nations as they transit across the Atlantic Ocean. The Wing has been recognized with four important visits this past year, from senior leaders in the Guard and the Air Force. This summer they were visited by General Darren McDew, commander of the Air Force’s Air Mobility Command, which is the Major Command ultimately responsible for the Wing’s mission. They were also visited by General Frank Grass, Chief of the National Guard Bureau, and in December we hosted Lieutenant General Sid Clarke, the Director of the Air National Guard. Finally, last month they were visited by the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General Mark Welsh, who spent the day in Bangor, recognizing the Wing’s Airmen for their many contributions to the Air Force mission.

The 243rd Engineering Installation Squadron deployed 33 personnel to Afghanistan between April and October 2014, in support of the effort to dismantle much of the US military infrastructure there. These men and women, along with the 265th Combat Communications Squadron, remain a key part of the Air Force’s ability to establish and maintain global communications and information networks, and are a very valuable asset to us here in Maine due to their skills and capabilities. The 265th recently added a small cyber operations component to their organization, one of the first communications

squadrons in the Air Guard to do so. This team, coupled with Airmen from the Wing in Bangor and Soldiers from the state headquarters in Augusta, are the backbone of any cyber incident response we may need from the Guard. 16 of our cyber Soldiers and Airmen just returned from a two week exercise in Indiana, where our Air Guard team was rated 2nd in the nation during a network operations competition. Additionally, one of the members of the 265th, Senior Airman Zachary Watkins, was selected this year as the national winner of the Air Force's General John Jumper Award for outstanding information and cyber operations performance. He is not able to be with us today, because he is a full time student in the University of Southern Maine's Computer Science department. We may have work to do in developing our abilities to handle a cyber emergency, but with men and women like Senior Airman Watkins on our team, I'm confident that we can get there.

Congratulations are also due to our state's recipients of the Outstanding Airman of the Year Awards, who were recognized by the Governor at a ceremony last week. They are Senior Airman Samuel Borer, Airman of the Year and Overall Winner, Technical Sergeant Zachary Taylor, Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year, Senior Master Sergeant Howard Gooldrup, Senior Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year, Captain Michele Pampinella, Company Grade Officer of the Year, Senior Master Sergeant Jeremiah Jordan, First Sergeant of the Year, and Technical Sergeant Joel Crowley, Honor Guard Member of the Year. Please join me in again congratulating these great

leaders and Airmen, who exemplify the Air Force values – Integrity First, Service Before Self, and Excellence In All That We Do.

The largest component of the Maine National Guard is the Army National Guard. Made up of 2140 men and women from around the state and beyond, it is commanded by Brigadier General Michael Bouchard, originally from Westbrook, and has Command Sergeant Major Scott Doyon as the Senior Enlisted Leader, and Chief Warrant Officer Five Darrell Stevens as the Command Chief Warrant Officer. General Bouchard is not with us today, as he lives and works in northern Virginia, and commutes to the state one week a month for his Guard duties – we are fortunate to have him, as he is a highly accomplished and committed leader. Command Sergeant Major Doyon is the newest member of our command team – he was selected in January to replace Sergeant Major Rick Hannibal, who left us last month to accept a position as the Operations Sergeant Major for US Africa Command, in Stuttgart, Germany. We were sorry to see him go, but were also very proud to have a Maine Guard Soldier selected for such an important and visible position.

The Army Guard has also had a busy year. We brought home the Headquarters of the 133rd Engineer Battalion from a nine-month deployment to Afghanistan, where they oversaw the effort reducing and eliminating bases and other infrastructure there – since their return last summer until now we have not had any Army Guard units from Maine deployed overseas, which is the longest period like it since 2003. In spite of this

slow-down in deployments, our units have continued to train vigorously and earn recognition for their many accomplishments. Our helicopter aviation units in Bangor, including the flight facility staff and C Company, 1st Battalion 126th Aviation, our Air Medevac unit, and elements of C Company, 3rd Battalion 142nd Aviation, passed their periodic Army-level aviation readiness inspection with a perfect rating, and are placed as some of the highest performing units in the nation.

As I have discussed earlier, one of the main themes of our recent work in the Guard is that of improving our capabilities in the cyber domain, and in order to accomplish that development we must have fully functional access to secure classified information systems. For several past years our state struggled with the complexity and difficulties of meeting Army requirements to maintain these important systems – in previous years we failed two critical inspections of our processes. Last year we underwent a third inspection which was a final opportunity to prevent our losing the ability to maintain our communications security account with the Army, and I'm happy to say that not only did we pass the inspection, we received a perfect score. The Soldier who was responsible for that dramatic turn-around is Master Sergeant Matthew Dow, who for his incredible efforts and leadership in this area was recognized nationally as the Guard's Outstanding Communications Security Account Manager of the Year. Please join me in recognizing him...

The Maine Army Guard today is in a better posture than it has ever been. We have made dramatic improvements in our systems and status over the last year, and are rated in the top ten in the country in virtually every indicator of readiness, including medical, training and personnel categories. Here are two specific areas that illustrate this point. The area of skill qualification – Soldiers having the required training for the position to which they're assigned – is one of the most important indicators of whether or not a unit is able to perform its mission. The Army National Guard average right now, across all the states and territories, is a qualification percentage of 87%. This is pretty good, given the major training budget cuts we are experiencing. The Maine Army National Guard right now is rated in this area first in the nation, with a percentage of 96.7%. This incredible success is due in large part to the diligence and leadership of our unit full-time personnel, and especially our operations and training team at the State Headquarters led by Sergeant Major Pete Kelley.

A second area of noteworthy success in our Army Guard is recruiting and re-enlistment. In the past three years we have gone from a struggle to reach our recruiting goals, to a position of leadership nationally. We met our recruiting goal last year, and were nationally ranked in the top ten in re-enlistment. Based on that success, we arranged with the National Guard Bureau to have our manpower strength goal set almost 20 Soldiers higher than the actual number of positions we have available in the state. Our remarkable men and women of the Recruiting and Retention Battalion, led by Lieutenant Colonel Jon Cookson and Command Sergeant Major Stacy Hafford, met that

strength goal of 2140 last month, fully seven months before the end of the fiscal year. Accordingly, we have arranged to have our number increased yet again, and we anticipate that we will have more Soldiers in the Maine Army Guard this September than we have had in almost a decade. One of the reasons for this level of success is the type of Soldier we have representing us in our recruiting force. Our state's top recruiter last year was Staff Sergeant Nate McCray. SSG McCray gained recognition several years ago when he was the first enlisted Soldier from the Maine Army Guard to ever graduate from the US Army Ranger School. He has gone to combat as an infantryman twice with the Maine Guard, in Iraq and Afghanistan, and has continued his record of achievement. He went on after being named top recruiter in Maine to be selected as the top recruiter in the northeast region – the first Maine Soldier to be so recognized in over ten years. Please join me in recognizing SSG McCray and thanking him for his service.

In closing, I must again say that serving and working with the remarkable people of this Department is one of the highlights of my almost 30 years in uniform. These Maine people represent all that is best in our great state, and routinely perform at a level where we truly expect them to be exceptional as a matter of course. They do this every day, with little or no fanfare, with precious few, and now dramatically dwindling resources, and they do what they do with grace and a sense of service that rightly should make all of us very proud. We face many challenges, particularly with budget uncertainty and projected Army force reductions, but you can all remain very confident, as I do, that

across this Department we will continue to execute our mission with pride and professionalism. Thank you again for the opportunity to address you.