

1-2-2019

Inaugural Address of Governor Janet T. Mills 2019

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Recommended Citation

Mills, Janet T., "Inaugural Address of Governor Janet T. Mills 2019" (2019). *Governor's Documents*. 53.
https://digitalmaine.com/ogvn_docs/53

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Read Gov. Janet Mills' inaugural address

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January 3, 2019

This is the inaugural address as written which was provided before the inauguration, not the transcript of the governor's speech as delivered.

Madam Chief Justice, Mr. President, Madam Speaker, members of the 129th Legislature, members of the state and federal judiciary, former Governors, Tribal chiefs, members of the military, friends, and family, honored guests, and those 4,346 friends of mine on Facebook!

I also draw your attention to the empty seat in the military section which honors and recognizes all Maine Service members currently deployed.



It is with humility and gratitude that I stand before you this evening.

I welcome you to a ceremony that represents both a change in the individual who occupies the office of the Chief Executive and the peaceful passing of the torch of progress.

There are many in this state who are “the unsung” as poet Wes McNair has called them.

They are the firefighters and teachers, the techies and hotel workers, the farmers and fishermen, the waiters and loggers, and the barbers and millworkers of our towns.

They are our friends, our neighbors. They are immigrants. Laborers. Veterans. People with disabilities. People from away. People we rely on every day. And many who rely on us.

This governorship is about them — the men and women of Maine.

This year, for the first time in our state's 198-year long history, after 74 men from York, Cumberland, Penobscot, finally you have elected a governor... from Franklin County!

I am from the foothills of Maine, which bred Margaret Chase Smith and Carrie Stevens.

And Cornelia Crosby — known as Fly Rod Crosby — who became Maine's first registered guide in 1897, and who famously said, “I would rather fish any day than go to heaven.”

In recent weeks I have received many letters. Eight-year old Lucy wrote, “Now I feel like I could become governor someday!”

The morning after the election, one mother left a note in her daughter's lunchbox, "Janet Mills won last night!" it said. "She is the FIRST woman to be the governor in Maine EVER! Think about all the things you can do! love, Mom."

I do think about all the things they can do, along with their brilliant brothers, uncles and fathers.

But truly, this year's milestone will one day be commonplace, like drinking milk or eating toast. When future generations read of this day, they will wonder what the fuss was about.

Sometimes our culture moves slowly in the stream of change.

Streams, like the people of Maine, change direction on occasion to find the best way forward.

Many days I awake to see the mist rising from the Sandy River as it steers its course to the Kennebec, the winter's breath unveiling a new day in my hometown, a new day in this state.

Then I hear the familiar sounds of chickadees, church chimes and Jake brakes.

This is home in Maine.

The Sandy River pours out of Rangeley Lake, meanders through town, and gains momentum on its way to the Kennebec.

There it joins other tributaries to become a powerful waterway, a loud home to eagles and salmon, stripers and sturgeon, on its course to Merrymeeting Bay.

The Sandy River connects my town to those up and downstream.

We become one with the rest of Maine, linked by water, woods, and land.

Former Governor Joshua Chamberlain described this link back in 1876:

"This great and wide sea...these beaches and bays and harbors...these things invite the brave, the noble...Thought comes here and dwells...They will love the land, and the land will give back strength."

The Wabanaki people know this bond. Their wisdom was passed along by people like Joseph Attean, legendary Governor of the Penobscot nation, a brave, open-hearted and forbearing individual, who guided Henry David Thoreau in his first moose hunt, through the vast and primitive wilderness to Chesuncook Lake.

The plaque that overlooks Attean Lake — named for him — reads,

"Rise free from care, before the dawn, and seek adventure."

Today we rise, a new day before us, and seek adventure.

But today our connection to the land is endangered.

After 80 years of studies warning that carbon emissions are destroying our environment, the danger is now at our doorstep.

The Gulf of Maine is warming faster than almost any other saltwater body in the world, driving our lobsters up the coast.

Our coastal waters are growing acidic; temperatures are fluctuating, and sea levels are rising, endangering our shellfish industry.

Our forests are less suitable for spruce and fir and more suitable for ticks.

Climate change is threatening our jobs, damaging our health and attacking our historic relationship to the land and sea.

Tonight I say, enough. Enough with studies, talk, and debate. It is time to act!

Our new Administration will embrace clean energy; change our modes of transportation; weatherize homes and businesses, and reach a goal of 50 percent of our electricity coming from Maine renewable resources.

These actions will create good-paying jobs, preserve our environment, and welcome young people to build a green future here in Maine.

And, by the way, when you drive by the Blaine House in the next few weeks, look for the new solar panels that we are going to install!

We need a healthy environment. And we need healthy people.

Maine voters agree – which is why they voted to expand Medicaid. Hospitals, nurses, doctors and businesses all agree as well.

Health care is for everyone, not just the well to do.

It is for the small businesses struggling to pay high health insurance bills.

It is for the family on the brink of bankruptcy because of one illness, accident or medical mishap.

It is for the community that takes up collections in a jar at the corner store to pay for a neighbor's medical costs.

It is for people like Patty.

My friend Patty was a vibrant, intelligent and charitable woman, an athlete, a mother of three wise children, loved by all... and uninsured.

She died needlessly from breast cancer, a disease that could have been diagnosed early, treated, and cured.

Patty's story is not unique. Many of you have friends like Patty. It is unacceptable.

In the memory of Patty and thousands of others, our new Administration will expand Medicaid – and pay for it sustainably; work to ensure that every person has primary care; control the cost of health insurance; and rein in the cost of prescription drugs.

A major part of the health care crisis is the opioid epidemic.

History will note that we have abandoned an entire generation of people to this preventable disease.

The allure of opiates can fill a hole in the human heart caused by loneliness, stress, and hopelessness.

Even as I speak, there is someone within the sound of my voice about to consume a deadly drug, jeopardizing themselves, their friends, their families, and their communities.

If that person is listening, please know that I—and many others — are here for you.

You are not alone.

We will confront this disease together.

We will offer a helping hand, not pass judgment.

We want you to survive, to succeed.

We want to welcome you home again.

It is time for action — Narcan widely available, medication assisted treatment, recovery coaches. These things will be a reality.

And in sad memory of the 418 Maine people who lost their lives to drug overdose in 2017, our Administration will create a Director of Opiate Response, a person who will marshal the collective power and resources of state government to stem the tide of this epidemic

Part of that effort will be to fully engage with people in our own communities — to “take it outdoors,” as one of our favorite retailers puts it, renewing a healing bond we have with the land.

In addition to protecting the medical health of our people, we will also advance the economic health of our people.

To employers, entrepreneurs and innovators, with new ideas for forest products, aquaculture, recreation, renewables, and everything in between, I say, “You are welcome here!”

We will develop a world-class workforce.

Fewer than half of Maine adults now hold a postsecondary credential — either a college degree or a professional certification. Yet two out of three jobs require such credentials.

This imbalance is why we have — at the same time — employers saying they can’t find workers,

and workers saying that they are stuck in dead-end jobs.

Education is the key to helping our people achieve their full potential.

Attracting talented young people to move here and make Maine their home will be a top priority of my Administration.

From now on, a sign will greet all those arriving in our state at the Kittery line.

It will say, quite simply: "Welcome Home."

I will work with the new Legislature to achieve the best education for our people, from preschool through college and beyond, beginning with full and fair funding for schools, including our Career and Technical Centers.

And we will treat our teachers with the respect and dignity they deserve.

There is no higher priority than our children.

And with so many young people at Long Creek, with children waiting for critical mental health services, and some even losing their lives to violence in their own homes, it is high time we put children's health and safety first.

I will start with one simple step — calling together the Children's Cabinet for the first time in years, to tackle these issues.

These are the challenges we know about. But we must also be prepared for the unexpected.

We know that a recession is possible in the next few years.

We know that someday, robots, drones, driverless cars, broadband, and 3-D printing, will radically alter the way Maine people live, learn, and work.

We need to be ready.

I made my own predictions back at the turn of the century.

In the year 1999, I wrote down in a journal a list of what I thought would change and what I thought would stay the same in the new millennium.

I predicted that in 50 years there would no longer be the following things: cash, paper bags, spare tires, lint, dust, or panty hose.

But in 50 years I said there would likely still be: Stephen King bestsellers, Baxter State Park, people from away, and ... Strom Thurmond.

As you can see, I cannot rely on myself to predict the future.

That's why I am enlisting help.

I am following the advice of writer Kurt Vonnegut, who said “Every government ought to have a Department of the Future.”

And so my administration will create an Office of Innovation and the Future.

This office will dive into major policy challenges, foster collaboration and propose concrete, workable solutions.

Now here’s how I want to govern.

We are all in this together. We all want Maine to have a beautiful environment; happy people; and prosperous communities.

Though we all agree on the goal, we differ about how to get there.

We are Republicans, Greens, Democrats, Libertarians, Independents, and many more besides.

This is something I know well myself.

I mean, every Mills family reunion is like a meeting of the United Nations – everyone has an opinion and wants a microphone.

But these differences are what make my family strong. They make every family strong. They make Maine strong.

Our diversity is a virtue – one that we should harness to advance good public debate and good public policy.

We welcome the voices of newcomers to the public conversation – the young, immigrants, people of different cultures, people of color, people of different orientations.

All are important members of the Maine family.

My town has always had a commons, where everybody could graze their sheep and cattle, sell produce and where we would enjoy a concert on a summer evening.

Now our state must find its own common ground, expand our horizons and become one Maine again.

From the tree streets of Lewiston to the rolling fields of the County, from the Bold Coast to the Height of Land, from Cross Rock in Allagash to Portland’s Promenades, our people will once again find unity of purpose.

We will bring back Maine’s tradition of civil discourse, expressed by Governor Israel Washburn, a friend of Abraham Lincoln’s, in his 1861 inaugural:

“Waving aside petty schemes and unseemly wrangles...let us rise, if we can, to the height of the great argument which duty and patriotism so eloquently address to us.”

You know, I have fallen in love a few times in my life. And there are those in this audience

whom I have loved for long and for years including friends and family and some newly loved.

But it is the bond we all share for our state, for children longing for security, for newcomers seeking to belong, for all of those who feel left behind, who long for respect and dignity.

One thing we all love is our great state.

And when a family, a community, a state believe in each other, help each other, love each other, great things can happen.

Maine people have greatness within them.

Maine is our home.

We are connected by the rivers and the land, the forests and the mountains.

We are connected by love.

We are strengthened by our connections.

We are one Maine, undivided, one family from Calais to Bethel, from York to Fort Kent.

We meet this evening, free from care, the heirs of Joseph Attean, Joshua Chamberlain, Fly Rod Crosby, and Israel Washburn.

Tomorrow we rise before the dawn — like the mist over the Sandy River — and seek adventure, with hope in our hearts and love in our souls for the brand-new day.

To all of you, and to the people of Maine, I say, Welcome Home.

Welcome Home.

Thank you.

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