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Governor of Maine, at the State Convention of the Maine
Teachers' Association, Portland, October 25, 1923**

Percival P. Baxter

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The Schools of Maine, 1923

ADDRESS OF

PERCIVAL P. BAXTER

GOVERNOR OF MAINE

AT THE

State Convention of the Maine
Teachers' Association



Portland, October 25, 1923

THE SCHOOLS OF MAINE, 1923

Address Delivered by Governor Percival P. Baxter
Before the Annual Convention of the Maine Teachers
Association at Portland, October 25, 1923.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen:—

Two years ago I had the privilege of standing upon this platform and expressing my appreciation of, and interest in the work that the school teachers of Maine were doing. I distinctly recall the 1921 Convention as one of the most worth while gatherings I have attended during my three years as Governor. Since then I have carefully studied the educational system of Maine, and today speak to you with an even deeper interest and more intimate knowledge than I had at that time. I have become familiar with the principal features and many details of school work in our State, and have reason to be proud of my associations with the group of earnest men and women assembled here today. You have a serious purpose in life and are doing your work conscientiously and for the public interest. There is no convention held in Maine that has greater possibilities for good than has yours, and as Governor I extend to you the State's welcome.

I had expected to have the pleasure of welcoming to our State as the distinguished guest of this Convention, Miss Olive M. Jones, President of that great organization of school teachers, the National Education Association, that reaches into every State and is composed of more than 130,000 members. Miss Jones has been in Maine before and consequently would not have been a stranger among us. Her presence would have proved an inspiration to us, and we all regret not having her at this meeting.

Our Responsibility to the Children

The Educational Department of our State resembles a large family in which the relations of the different members are both friendly and cordial. All are working together

harmoniously, and as Chief Executive I take pride in their accomplishments. Our Educational system reaches out into every corner of our State, and there is no department that comes into such close and intimate contact with our people. Its work, everything considered, is the most interesting that is being done through our governmental agencies, and it goes without saying that it is the most important.

Our school teachers, both men and women, are a vital factor in our community, because the future of the State very largely is in their hands. They are the ones who are training the rising generation. In my travels about the State I have come into contact with school teachers, school committees, and scholars in all grades and under all conditions, and I feel that I know something of the intimate workings of our school system. If you and I do our part toward shaping the thought of the boys and girls of Maine, and toward starting them ahead along proper lines, I feel confident that they will not fail to do theirs. The children of Maine have the right to insist that everything possible be done to give them the proper equipment they need to carry on the work of life. If we fail to do this for them the fault is ours, but the price therefor will be paid by them. This is a situation where those who neglect to perform their duties toward others are not the ones who suffer, and for that reason every effort should be made to stimulate and care for the young people who are growing up in our midst.

Progress and Competition

During the past few years marked progress has been made in educational work in Maine, and this is due not only to the able heads of the department, but also to those associated with them, and to those earnest teachers all over Maine who have generously given them their co-operation. All of you have contributed to our educational advancement. Maine, of course, is at a considerable disadvantage due to our limited financial resources, and there sometimes is danger of losing those who have become of unusual value to us. It is unreasonable to expect that educators always will be content to remain in one community and they are not to be blamed when they leave for wider fields. This is inevitable, for we cannot compete in salaries or opportunities for advancement with the larger and more wealthy states. No doubt many teachers in Maine are making real sacrifices to remain at their posts here, but loyalty to their State and a personal interest in their children fortunately often are the determining factors.

It afforded me much satisfaction to reappoint as head of our School Department the present Commissioner of Education. Under our State law this office is placed in a different class from the others that come under the Governor's jurisdiction, for the Commissioner of Education holds his place at the "pleasure of the Chief Executive." I assure you, that I shall be greatly "pleased" if Dr. Thomas holds his position as long as I am Governor, for he has made a very definite contribution to educational advancement in Maine.

Renewed Effort Needed

We, however, must not allow ourselves to be satisfied with the progress we have made in the past, for there is much work yet to be done. No state ever can hope to have a "perfect" educational system because with advancing thought the standards constantly become higher and higher, and always are a little beyond what it is possible to attain. Renewed efforts on our part are constantly necessary and we must never allow ourselves to become in the least complacent. The work we have done is but a beginning, and shows what can be accomplished, while the goal ahead of us is to have Maine lead her sister states in all educational matters.

Parents Often Indifferent

Those of us who are interested in education realize its importance, but our people as a whole, in my opinion, do not do so. They know that we have schools and that good work is being done, but they are not familiar with details, nor do they understand what we are striving for. They are generous in their appropriation of funds but as a rule fail to follow up their expenditure or give personal attention to the schools in their communities.

I often have asked myself the question, What would be the most helpful thing that could happen to the cause of education in Maine? I think the answer is: The intelligent and consistent interest of parents, and their co-operation with the teachers. Too many parents are content to send their children to school and forget about them while they are there. Fathers and mothers often expect school teachers to turn out a perfect product, while at home, on their own part, they do little or nothing to support the efforts of the teachers. School work should be followed up in the home, and the parents should take an active interest in the details of their children's education. They should become personally acquainted, not only with the teachers, but with school conditions and those in charge of school affairs.

Parents' organizations would be helpful in every school district, and it would be well if frequently a "Parents' Day" was celebrated in the school rooms. The teachers should be made to feel welcome in the home, and should be regarded as members of the families of their pupils. I am sure that teachers, due to the indifference of parents, often meet with many discouragements and lose heart in their work. No doubt you all can see what rapid strides would be made by your scholars if intelligent co-operation came from those who have charge of the children during the hours when they are not in school.

Our "Greatest Asset"

It often is remarked that the boys and girls of Maine are its "greatest asset," and although this sounds somewhat commonplace I believe it is worth constant repetition. Once our people get this idea implanted in their minds they will see to it that the boys and girls of Maine are given the opportunities for advancement to which they are entitled. The young people of Maine, in my opinion, are as energetic and as wholesome a group as can be found anywhere in this country, and they will grow up to be worthy representatives of the State of Maine. Wherever they go they will carry with them the traditions of this State. They will find that Maine men and women both at home and abroad as a rule live up to high ideals and stand for what is best in the communities where they reside. There is a future for these young people if you and I do what is right by them.

Morals in Our Schools

Occasionally I hear stories of the failings of young people, and sometimes am told about their shortcomings. I can say without fear of successful contradiction that in my day the young people as a rule resisted whatever evil influences they came in contact with, and indulged only in clean and proper amusement. I have no reason to question but that the young people of today are just as upright and moral as those of former years, and I resent the sensational stories that sometimes are spread abroad about conditions in the higher grades of some of our public schools. Evidently no one, not even our young folks, can escape the evil rumors that are prevalent, but we have a right to protest against our boys and girls being maligned as sometimes is done in certain sections of the State.

The schools of today with their athletics, their manual training courses, and their health crusades are doing more

than ever to make our young people sound in body and mind. If there are any lapses they can, as a rule, be traced to the lack of parental authority and influence. Certainly our teachers are not to be blamed for the shortcomings of parents. If our teachers told all they knew about parents, often times they could show the real reasons why the young people do not do as well as they should. I do not doubt but that every teacher in the State is desirous of having the children under his or her care grow up to become citizens of the highest type.

Disrespect for Law

In these days in certain quarters there is too much disrespect for law, and I regret to say that this is more evident in the homes of the well-to-do than in the homes of those less fortunately situated. Here again the responsibility for the child's training rests largely upon the parents, and in some homes children are growing up to look upon law enforcement as a matter of little moment, considered lightly, and often laughed at. This is especially so in reference to the prohibitory law. The parents that I refer to, themselves being lacking in respect for law, must expect that their point of view will be reflected in their children. It is difficult to over-state the importance of this question; its influence is far reaching.

As an illustration of the manner in which respect for law is regarded by those in positions of authority, I recall to you that at the recent conference of forty Governors they all believed in law-enforcement while but four of them expressed disapproval of our prohibition laws. Every Governor appreciates the danger of opening the door to the violation of law. The Memoial addressed to President Coolidge, and adopted by the Governors without a dissenting vote states: "Observance of law is the fundamental basis of American citizenship, and enforcement of law is the primary duty of every official." No citizen can escape individual responsibility in this matter, and every one of us should not only observe the law, but should do everything in our power to help officials enforce it. It was an inspiration to meet the Governors of our sister states and to find them all in accord on this great principle.

President Coolidge in his address to the Governors expressed in the strongest language the duty and responsibilities of the individual citizen, and in the seven points which he presented special emphasis was laid upon law enforcement and law observance, as well as upon the need of teaching temperance to the rising generation.

If a proper structure is to be erected in the hearts and

minds of our young people the corner stone thereof is respect for and observance of law, for only on such a basis can character and good citizenship be successfully constructed. I urge upon the teachers of the State the need of emphasizing upon every occasion these two vital principles. Only by example, and by constant repetition of these principles will they be brought home to the minds of the rising generation. I doubt if the teachers of Maine fully realize how much "example" means. I distinctly recall that in my school days I looked up to my teachers and expected them to be almost perfect. Teachers should have this in mind in all their relations with their scholars, for these young folks are in the most impressionable period of their lives and are quick to detect any deviation from the highest standards.

World Conference of Education

Recently there was held in San Francisco a World Conference on Education at which 62 nations were represented. This was without doubt the greatest educational conference ever held, and it affords Maine people much satisfaction to know that our Commissioner of Education took a prominent part in it and was chosen President of the World Federation of Educational Associations. In fact Dr. Thomas was the real leader of the Convention and had more to do with shaping its policies than any other delegate. The possibilities of this conference are limitless; it came out openly for international peace and good will, and laid out a program which will mean more to the peace of the World than the high sounding phrases that often have been adopted by politicians and diplomats. There was no intimation of politics at this great gathering, and those who attended were not bound by that national selfishness and complacency that so often has dominated other international conferences.

Peace through Education

The sure foundation for World Peace is through education. If young people can be taught that nations can live and advance side by side without those jealousies that so often lead to conflict, there soon will come upon the stage a great body of men and women who will see to it that selfish politicians and schemers no longer hold control of world affairs. I know of nothing that has occurred which offers so much hope for the future as the San Francisco Conference, and Dr. Thomas has become an international figure in this great movement.

The day is coming, and it may not be as far away as some

would have us think, when the principal civilized nations of the World simultaneously will lay down their arms and live together in peace. Human beings the world over are animated by similar motives and aspirations. There is no reason why they should clash and thus bring on conflicts of arms, most of which have been the result of schemes and plots of those who seek to profit through the sufferings and sacrifices of others.

Public Taste in Newspapers

During the World Conference I followed carefully its proceedings, and it is a sad commentary on the press and people of this country to note the scant attention that the great metropolitan papers gave to what was transpiring at San Francisco. The excuse the papers offer is that they were catering to the taste of their readers. At the time of the conference a great prize fight was being staged in the State of Montana, and the papers were filled with accounts of that fight and its preparation. International news was slighted, and any citizen from a foreign country properly could draw the inference that practically all of the people of this country were absorbed in the pugilistic encounter that was taking place.

The Christian Science Monitor prepared figures to show the comparative amount of space allotted by the leading newspapers to the prize fight and to the educational conference. When one realizes that the average metropolitan paper devoted 184 $\frac{5}{6}$ columns to the prize fight and 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ columns to the educational conference it readily will be seen how they regarded their relative importance. This ratio was more than 50 to 1 in favor of the prize fight, while some of the principal dailies of this country did not even mention the conference or the National Educational Association under whose auspices it was being held. Of all the papers that came to my attention the Monitor gave the best accounts of the San Francisco meeting, while the Boston Transcript took second place. If the 50 to 1 figures were reversed there then would have been far too much space devoted to the brutal contest in Montana.

In almost every daily paper that comes into the home there are entire pages devoted to past, present and future prize fights, and the papers here in Maine are no exception to the rule. It seems to me it is very unfortunate that this should be so, for it has a bad influence not only upon the children but on their parents.

I believe in wholesome athletics and in sports of all kinds, but the "ringside" gossip and other writeups that crowd our

dailies and keep out real news, lower the high standing of our newspapers and vitiate the taste of their readers. When we realize that the gate receipts from one of these great fights runs into several hundred thousand dollars and tens of thousands of persons attend, it reflects upon our twentieth century civilization.

One day I was working in my office at the Capitol and the telephone rang. Certain enthusiastic prize fight "fans" said they were planning to bring the heavyweight champion of the world to my office to call upon me, but I replied that I did not have the time to meet him and the incident was closed. I always am glad to meet the citizens of Maine, and none of them occupy a position too humble for them to come to the Governor's office, but I am not at all interested to meet pugilistic champions, no matter how widely advertised their prowess. In these matters we need to cultivate a proper sense of proportion, and it is well for us sometimes to stand against the thoughtless tide of public opinion.

School Sports in Japan

In speaking of sports I want to speak of the way they are conducted in Japan. In that country every child in the school takes part in school games. I have seen several thousand children gathered in the great parks that abound in Japanese cities, running races and playing athletic games that do much to build up their youthful bodies. These young Japs eagerly enter into their sports, under the watchfulness of the teachers who always accompany them. From the smallest scholars of the first and second grades up to those in the high school, all take part, and the games are arranged in most artistic fashion.

Another custom that is prevalent all over Japan is for the teachers to take their scholars to shrines and other historic spots, and to the famous scenic places of their country. One hardly ever travels upon a Japanese train without encountering groups of children of all sizes, in parties large and small, following a teacher and taking in all the artistic and historical points of interest. These journeys cultivate in the minds of youth a sense of loyalty to their country and an appreciation of its history. It is seldom that our teachers take their school children about the country, even to visit local points of interest. I always am delighted to have our young people come to the Capitol for it teaches them patriotism and good citizenship, and gives them some understanding of what a republic, and a government by the people means.

The Rural Schools

The schools of our State are divided into two distinct classes, the city and the rural schools; the former as a rule are properly housed and have suitable equipment. Moreover in the cities there is a strong public sentiment in favor of good schools, and this is reflected through the school committees and those who are responsible for school work. The city schools in most places are being well taken care of. The rural schools are my immediate concern.

In the country districts distances are great and the interest that school committeemen often times take in their work is slight. The school children who go to the "little red school-house" are under a decided disadvantage, and in many cases are not being given a fair start in life. More than half of our children attend the rural schools. I have stopped at school houses on cross roads and out of the way places and seen a single teacher struggling along with 20 or 30 scholars in eight different grades. No teacher, no matter how devoted and competent, can successfully handle eight grades at one and the same time. It is more than should be expected of anyone. I marvel they accomplish as much as they do, and it certainly speaks volumes for their patriotism and persistence. Recently I stopped at a country school house where one teacher had 32 scholars in eight grades and she was as cheerful as could be and was doing her best. In this case the school house was clean and wholesome, while another school house a short distance away was far from what it should be, and its condition was reflected in the dejected attitude both of the teacher and the children. At the latter place there were no sanitary arrangements worth speaking of, and I do not see how the building could be kept decently warm even in moderately cold weather. This latter school is in a prosperous town and within three miles of the village; I know of a school 100 miles in the wilderness that puts it to shame!

Whenever I see a tumbledown school house that has been abandoned and its children taken to a union school house, I rejoice for both children and teachers. In these union schools sanitary conditions are up to date. Teachers and scholars are graded and the opportunities for education in such places are vastly improved. We are making considerable progress in this work, and I always enjoy visiting these union schools and have taken part in their dedication.

The rural school house is our real problem, for it is costly and an economic waste. 40% of our teachers are in one room schools, and this 19th century institution as a rule is not a

proper place in which to train 20th century children. I am not surprised that in some of our country districts there are abandoned farms, for certainly no self-respecting farmer will live in a community unless his children are able to obtain proper education there. In such places a high school education often is unattainable. In my opinion the farm and the school go hand in hand, and you cannot expect to have good schools where there are poor farms, and certainly where there are good farms there is no excuse for poor schools. The problem of each is interwoven with the other.

Lighthouse Children

I was much encouraged a few days ago to receive a personal letter from Hon. Herbert Hoover, Secretary of Commerce. His Department has charge of the lighthouses along the coast, and he wrote expressing his appreciation for what the State of Maine school authorities had done to provide proper schooling for the children of the lighthouse keepers. He said that this State has made unusual progress in this respect and that now practically every lighthouse child is being taken care of. This letter of congratulation was entirely voluntary and came as a surprise to both Dr. Thomas and myself. We are making a special effort to have our children in the out of the way places properly educated. Unusually good work is being done for the children in our unorganized townships.

Governors' Conference and Schools

I have referred to my recent trip to the Governor's Conference, and one incident in particular made me feel very much at home in Indiana. On our trip through the center of that State our party stopped to inspect a new school house, of which the local people were very proud. Warning had been given of our coming and the children were all out in front waving flags and singing songs. This has been so often my experience in Maine that for a moment I thought I was in my home State. Every Governor enjoyed the meeting and all of them expressed their interest in schools and school children. They told of the fine buildings that were being constructed in their respective states, and on this point at least I was able to hold up my end of the conversation. All the Governors were proud of the progress that was being made in their schools, and I could see that all the states are taking forward steps in the education of the children. Certainly they all are spending more money on schools than on any other branch of State work, and this means a great deal for the future.

Illiteracy

The National Educational Association is making a great drive to wipe out illiteracy in this country. We have made some progress in Maine but our efforts have not been rewarded with any unusual success. In 1920 there were 20,140 illiterates ten years and over in Maine, or 3.3%. More than one-half of these live in the country districts. I wish this illiteracy could be wiped out during the next five years, but to do so we must take hold of the problem more vigorously than in the past. We cannot attain the end we seek unless citizens in general take a greater interest in this work. In this matter there is a good deal of indifference on the part of the public. It would be splendid if Maine could lead the states in wiping out this stain, and certainly there is no reason why we cannot stand at the top, for 78% of our citizens are native born and we do not have a great annual influx of people of foreign birth. I am encouraged at one feature of this situation however, and that is that in 1920 there were but 575 juvenile illiterates in Maine. Let us resolve that in 1930 there will not be an illiterate in the State of Maine. In this connection I want to speak about our child labor laws.

Maine Child Labor Laws

Maine's Child Labor Laws have given the State a high standing on this question. With us no child under 14 years of age can work in any mechanical or manufacturing establishment, while no child under 15 can work "at any business or service for hire, whatever," while the schools of the community in which it lives are in session. If a child has completed six grades in our public schools and is between 15 and 16 years of age it may be employed under a work permit, but if the child is between 14 and 15 it must obtain a permit if it intends to work in any manufacturing establishment even while the schools are not in session. In June, 1923, there were but 227 work permits outstanding in Maine, and in November of this year there were 219. This is an unusual record which few states can equal. It shows that there is very little child labor in mercantile and manufacturing establishments. Maine certainly has no reason to be ashamed of the way it handles its child labor, and although there are reasons for strengthening the law, its provisions at the present time are well within reason.

The Public School

The public school is the bulwark of democracy. In it

children from every station in life come together and learn the lesson of American citizenship. I myself went through the public schools of Portland and graduated from our High School. My parents were wise in doing this instead of shipping me off to some exclusive private academy, there to grow up in utter ignorance of what American democracy means. I am sorry for the "poor little rich" children who are forced to go to private schools. We all must be on guard lest any inroads be made upon our public school system, and must see to it that they not only are protected but are maintained at the highest standards. The underlying principle of the public school is sound, and the leading and most patriotic Americans of this and former generations unreservedly have given it their support.

In my Inaugural Address of January 4, 1923, as well as in a special message addressed a few weeks later to the 81st Legislature, I made an earnest plea for the public school and for the principle that no public money be diverted to the support of private schools, sectarian or otherwise. This is an issue that is being widely discussed in our State and those who believe in the public school now should rally to its defense.

It is interesting to look back and see how prominent men of former generations regarded the public school. General Ulysses S. Grant in 1875, in an address in Iowa, spoke as follows:

"The free school is the promoter of that intelligence which is to preserve us as a free nation. Encourage free schools, and resolve that not one dollar of money appropriated to their support, no matter how raised, shall be appropriated to the support of any sectarian school. Resolve that the State or Nation, or both combined, shall furnish to every child growing up in the land the means of acquiring a good common school education, unmixed with sectarian, pagan, or atheistic tenets. Leave the matter of religion to the family altar, the church, and the private school supported entirely by private contributions. Keep the Church and State forever separate."

Compulsory Attendance

Every child of school age in Maine should be compelled to attend school, for every child is an asset to our country and this asset never will attain its full value unless the child is properly educated. I believe we are a little weak on school attendance for the 1920 Census showed 5,735 children between 7 and 13 years of age not going to school and our State ranks 18th in this respect. Massachusetts heads the list of

States. I urge upon our school authorities to see to it that not a single child within their respective jurisdictions is overlooked. This can be attended to only by the local authorities.

Humane Education

Some years ago a law was passed providing that "all teachers in the public schools of the State shall devote not less than ten minutes of each week of the school term to teaching to the children under their charge the principles of kindness to birds and animals." (Chap. 16, Sec. 108.) In my opinion this law is more honored in its breach than in its observance, and I want to call the attention of the teachers of the State to it. The child who is taught to respect the rights of the weak and helpless, whether these be humans or dumb animals, grows up to be a better citizen. In this world the strong are able to protect themselves, while the weak and those who cannot speak deserve the constant care of every thoughtful human being.

Kindness, in my opinion, is the greatest of all the virtues, and I am especially fond of the poem of John Boyle O'Reilly, entitled.

WHAT IS GOOD?

"What is the real good?"
I asked in musing mood.

Order, said the law court;
Knowledge, said the school;
Truth, said the wise man;
Pleasure, said the fool;
Love, said the maiden;
Beauty, said the page;
Freedom, said the dreamer;
Home, said the sage;
Fame, said the soldier;
Equity, the seer;—

Spake my heart full sadly,
"The answer is not here."

Then within my bosom
Softly this I heard:
"Each heart holds the secret;
Kindness is the word."

A child who loves and is kind to animals naturally is kind

to children. Nothing is finer than to meet a boy who is manly and not afraid to stand up for and help some sick or abused dog, cat or bird. Many men seem to feel it beneath them to speak in defense of creatures of a lower order than themselves. Some of you may not have heard of the Washington County boy who last Winter walked 48 miles to bring home his lost dog. That boy will make a good citizen, and the picture of him and his dog is one of my most interesting possessions. Animals have rights and man is under an obligation to his Creator to respect those rights and do everything to relieve the untold amount of needless suffering to which our dumb animals are subjected by the cruel and thoughtless. At my suggestion Dr. Thomas is preparing a bulletin to be sent to all the schools of the State, urging the teachers to observe the humane instruction law and to do everything in their power, both by example and precept, to impress upon our young people that all of God's creatures were placed in this world for a purpose and that kindness to animals is no less a virtue than is kindness to humans.

The "Arctic Brotherhood"

Our late President Harding was not ashamed to show his interest in dumb animals and was a great champion of the humane cause. Upon every occasion he gave it his support and always was counted upon the side of those who were working in behalf of our dumb friends and companions. When President Harding was in Alaska last Summer he joined the "Arctic Brotherhood," an organization that flourishes in the far North, whose members pledge themselves under oath never to do an unkind thing to a horse or dog. I should like to see this "Arctic Brotherhood" idea extended into the regions below the Arctic circle, and broadened out so that its oath would include the protection of every dumb animal and bird. I myself have done what I could both by example and by proclaiming "Bird Days" and "Be Kind to Animals Week" in Maine, and have tried to impress upon our people that our relations with the animal kingdom are mutually interdependent.

School Resources of Maine

The State of Maine is generous in its support of its public schools and considering our limited resources I believe we are doing well. Not long ago I prepared a diagram of our "tax dollar" which showed just how every dollar of the tax payers money is spent by the State Government. The

largest single item on this diagram is for education, and shows that 31% of every State dollar is spent upon our schools. For charity, health and welfare work there is spent 25%, and for roads and bridges 23% on each dollar. Some states spend even a larger percentage of the tax dollar on education than we do. I earnestly wish that we immediately had available \$5,000,000 or \$6,000,000 of State money with which we could eliminate the "little red school houses" that dot our highways and byways, mostly the latter. Maine people however are determined that their schools shall not fall behind, and I predict that each year there will be steady improvement.

My ideal for the schools of Maine is for every child within the State to receive at least a grammar school education, this to be extended as rapidly as possible so as to include a high school education for all. That is the goal toward which we must work. I want to see a "square deal" given to the children in the rural districts. They are my chief concern.

Clean living and clear thinking for our young people is the end toward which we constantly are striving. There is a line I never shall forget, for its appeal is enduring, "Education is the debt Eternal of maturity to youth." As Governor of Maine I hope to be able to make some definite contribution toward advancing the interests of the rising generation of our State.

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Charles Baxter". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Governor of Maine.