MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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Legislative Record

House of Representatives

One Hundred and Thirty-First Legislature

State of Maine

Daily Edition

First Special Session

Beginning April 5, 2023

Beginning with Page H-277

79 having voted in the affirmative and 61 voted in the negative, with 11 being absent, and accordingly **House Amendment "B" (H-720)** to **Committee Amendment "A" (H-103)** was **ADOPTED**.

Committee Amendment "A" (H-103) as Amended by House Amendment "B" (H-720) thereto was **ADOPTED**.

Subsequently, the Bill was **PASSED TO BE ENGROSSED as Amended by Committee Amendment "A" (H-103) as Amended by House Amendment "B" (H-720)** thereto in **NON-CONCURRENCE** and sent for concurrence.

ORDERED SENT FORTHWITH.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEE
Divided Report

Majority Report of the Committee on **APPROPRIATIONS AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS** reporting **Ought to Pass as Amended by Committee Amendment "A" (H-717)** on Bill "An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2023, June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025" (EMERGENCY)

(H.P. 163) (L.D. 258)

Signed:

Senators:

ROTUNDO of Androscoggin
BENNETT of Oxford
DUSON of Cumberland

Representatives:

SACHS of Freeport
BLIER of Buxton
CARLOW of Buxton
COLLINGS of Portland
FAY of Raymond
GATTINE of Westbrook
MATLACK of St. George
MILLETT of Waterford
MILLETT of Cape Elizabeth

Minority Report of the same Committee reporting **Ought Not to Pass** on same Bill.

Signed:

Representative:

DUCHARME of Madison

READ.

Representative SACHS of Freeport moved that the House **ACCEPT** the Majority **Ought to Pass as Amended** Report.

Representative MORRIS of Turner **REQUESTED** a roll call on the motion to **ACCEPT** the Majority **Ought to Pass as Amended** Report.

More than one-fifth of the members present expressed a desire for a roll call which was ordered.

The SPEAKER: The Chair recognizes the Representative from Turner, Representative Morris.

Representative **MORRIS**: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We can do better. Maine people deserve better. This budget is another example of government picking winners and losers, raising taxes and breaking promises.

As Maine people are struggling with inflation, as Maine people struggle under one of the most oppressive tax burdens in the country, we are presented with a budget that raises taxes and increases spending to $11 billion in the biennium. We are squandering an opportunity to deliver real tax relief and allow the people to keep more of their money. That's more of their money to pay for rising grocery costs, more of their money to pay for rising electricity costs, more of their money to pay for high gas prices, more of their money to pay for rising health care costs caused by mandates piled on them by a State Government. That's more money for business owners that have seen their unemployment taxes rise because of an expensive new pilot program. We have record revenues coming into our State, yet rather than help struggling Mainers with these increased costs by reducing their taxes, we're going to double down with a massive new big government program that will take more money from their paychecks in the form of a new payroll tax.

Our business community has sacrificed a lot in the last few years. They were forced to close their doors, reduce their capacity and missed an entire tourist season. Despite all this, they have persevered by providing services and jobs to our friends and neighbors. Their taxes have supported this Government. Their voluntary gifts have funded churches and charities all over Maine. Yet, how does this budget propose to repay them? We're going to force yet another administrative and tax burden on them with a massive new tax program. Under this new tax program, not only will Maine businesses and their workers have to pay a tax on the wages they pay their employees, but they are going to have to pay for replacements when the employee takes time off. The worst part of this new tax program is that we still don't know the costs. There has been no actuarial analysis done on how much in taxes will be needed. While the proponents state the tax is 1% right now, beginning in 2028, the program administrator that the Government contracts with is authorized to increase the tax to account for the utilization.

The State Constitution is clear. It states that the Legislature shall never, in any manner, suspend or surrender the power of taxation. Yet this new payroll tax will be calculated and assessed by a third-party administrator. I plan to uphold my oath today, not abdicate the authority over taxation to a corporation. We don't need to use our taxing authority to require businesses to offer benefits. This is not our job. Many employers in Maine already offer some form of paid FMLA. The benefits they offer are a contract between the employer and the employee. In order to attract talent, they offer competitive benefits and compensation packages. In short, they offer what employees demand through a free market. We do not need to impose a new tax on them, hindering them in competition for talent with employers in other states.

Speaking of other states, this budget continues the policies of higher taxes and bigger government will ensure Maine is uncompetitive with other states when it comes to attracting jobs and capital. It will ensure that fewer people want to start a business or grow their business in Maine. We have seen those states that have lower taxes and less regulation have seen people moving in, there are more jobs and higher incomes for their citizens. Indeed, people are fleeing high tax states like Maine, California and New York for places like Florida, Texas and New Hampshire.

Supporting this budget is supporting breaking promises to the people of Maine. In 2005, the Legislature made a promise that once education was funded at 55%, State Government would be limited in how much it can grow. A promise to our constituents that we were limiting the growth of Government and committing to allowing them to keep more of their money. Continuing a policy of more spending and higher taxes, as this budget proposes, is not sustainable or wise. It will continue the export of young people and people of all ages to other parts of

the country where there is no income tax. It ensures Maine will not be seen as a place for employers offering good-paying jobs and benefits to invest their capital.

This budget also represents a broken promise to our senior citizens. Many of our seniors have lived on their homesteads for more than 50 years. They have raised their families there. They want nothing more than to retire and live out their days in a place where they have fond memories. This has become hard, as property taxes have risen beyond their ability to pay. I know I, Madam Speaker, have certainly bragged in the past about what we have done here to increase revenue sharing to our municipalities, but the reality is those increased revenues rarely result in lower property taxes, rather just increased spending. To combat this, we enacted legislation in the 130th that allows seniors to have their property taxes frozen. The program has been popular with our seniors. Indeed, in just the last few days, on the Fourth of July, as I was walking in a parade, I heard from several of my constituents that have heard this program may be in trouble. When I told them that it was in trouble, the response I got was; I knew it was too good to be true. Our citizens have such a fatalistically negative view of State Government that they expect a program that helps them would be extinguished. The only people that had a problem with the program were the municipal governments, because it creates a new administrative burden and they may not get all the money they are promised from Augusta. Well, proponents have said that there is a new program, and that is true, it will require seniors to fill out an income tax return, something that the current program does not require of them. In effect, it shifts the administrative burden onto our seniors and we know full well that many of them will not take the time to fill out a tax return.

We can do better; we must do better than this budget. The people of Maine deserve better than this budget that picks winners and losers. Rather than reduce our tax burden, it increases it, and adds costly new regulations on job creators and workers alike. We can do better than broken promises. I encourage all of us to reject this budget, rather than continue these policies. Let's work to create an economy and tax system that keeps people in Maine and allows them to grow their business, prosper and leave something for their progeny.

The SPEAKER: The Chair recognizes the Representative from Buxton, Representative Blier.

Representative **BLIER**: Thank you, Madam Speaker, Ladies and Gentlemen of the House. I do not rise today to change your minds because I know most of your minds are already made up, and that's fine. I rise here today to explain a few things in my experience this year as a freshman legislator in the Appropriations Committee. Our side of the aisle definitely was eager and willing to work with the other side of the aisle to come up with a bipartisan budget that we could all agree with. And, Madam Speaker, we really worked really hard at that. And as the other side was doing a deep dive, we were sitting in the office waiting so they could come up for air and give us some of the information that they acquired during their deep dive. And, you know what, we received that information, packets of information, just a few minutes prior to us voting. For us to really look at this information would've taken us a deep dive and we didn't have that opportunity, which is really unfortunate. But at the end of the day, I'm not here to complain. I did the best that I could. But I look at this budget and, even though I voted for it at the Appropriation Table and my fingers are all over this budget, Madam Speaker, on things that I put in place. Over the weekend, the 4th of July weekend, and I was able to get some rest and calm my mind and really think things through, I came to the realization that, you know, my task as a legislator is to pass laws that are great for the people of Maine, not just my constituency. Me running for reelection is not the most important thing; doing what's right for the people of Maine is really my top priority.

Some of the items that are in this budget, for example, Madam Speaker, that I voted for, is this EMS provision of $31 million. You know, when I was a Selectman and I was representing my community in negotiations for the fire department, we had an ARPA fund that was given to most EMS providers through our State. And what that did, Madam Speaker, is that when I was negotiating, it raised wages because most communities used those ARPA funds for impact pay. So, during the union negotiations, in order for us to be equivalent to all the other communities, we had to raise our wages. We're going to give $31 million to all our communities, only the EMS providers that are hurting. At the end of the day, everybody's hurting because municipalities subsidize EMS provisions. Nobody's profitable, so, everyone will be able to fill out that form and everybody will get money and they'll take those monies and give it to their employees for some sort of wages, because that's part of the criteria required, and it will just raise the rate of EMS provision. Truthfully, we need to change the way we do EMS in our communities and this doesn't do that. All this will do is raise the rate of inflation in EMS provisions, which is a real disaster.

While I was on the Housing Committee, Madam Speaker, we allocated $70 million to new construction. Seventy million dollars gives us about 300 units. We're 20,000 units shy. Do we need more than $70 million worth of infrastructure to feed or housing people in the State of Maine? Absolutely, we do. Here's the problem; I don't think we built 300 houses in the State of Maine last year. If you're going to add 300 new houses, you got to double the carpenters, you got to double the electricians, you got to double the plumbers and you got to double the building materials. Guess what's going to happen? Inflation is going to happen. Although we need the housing, I get it, we need to implement this money a little bit slower. It's a double-edged sword; I totally understand that. But the problem is I've been here for seven months and, you know what, I'm a landlord and I'm so far behind on work I had to hire somebody this week and I'm paying him $90 an hour. In one month's time, I will give up my wages over here. And so, as people complain as rate of rents are going up, you understand why. This is what's happening.

There's so much in this bill that I have my fingerprints on that I voted for but, at the end of day thinking, during this past week, is not good for the State of Maine on the longevity. This is going to create inflation, this budget does nothing really to help the people of Maine in the long-term. It does in the short-term, but in the long-term, we're going to be backwards. Three hundred thousand dollars a unit is what it costs us for a unit today. I'm saying in three years, we're going to be $400,000 to $450,000 a unit. All the money that we're given will be gone. So, I am going to vote against this budget. Although my intentions were really to try to work on a bipartisan level relationship with the other side to make something that is feasible and that overtook me, as I had time to sit in my home and really think about it this week, while most of you were probably enjoying life, I was really thinking about what I voted for and this is not good for the Maine people. So, today, I'm flipping and I am voting against this budget. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The SPEAKER: The Chair recognizes the Representative from Madison, Representative Ducharme.

Representative **DUCHARME**: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As most of you know, I was the Ought Not to Pass in Committee on the budget. I could stand up here today and recount for you a whole host of reasons, a host of budget lines that really gave me a lot of heartburn, but I'm not going to do that. What I'm going to do is I'm going to talk about what we went into the whole budget exercise with in terms of thought process and how that played out.

One of the things that we had said was that we would like to look for a way to provide some sort of structural tax relief for Maine people. That came from the fact, and it is a fact, that we returned $1.3 billion to Maine people in excess tax collection. So, looking at that, knowing that the revenues were over what we had looked at in the prior biennial budget, we were just collecting way more money than what we needed to run State Government. So, we thought a structural tax relief package would work. Our leadership came through; after the March 30th budget was passed, our leadership came out and said we would entertain a package that maybe $400 million in tax relief was something that our caucus could support. That's 0.38% [*sic*] of a $10.6 billion budget. After working with that number for 10 days or so, we came up with probably about a package that would equal about $200 million, which is 1.8%. But the folks on the other side of the aisle didn't want to do that. They had other priorities for the money. This is Maine people's money. It's their money. We're collecting more than we need to run government. Now, perhaps folks have different ideas of what the right thing to do is, and you and I have had that discussion but the reality is, is somebody has to pay for all of these things that we're passing here.

So, we went back to the drawing board, came up with a budget package, a tax relief package, that amounted to $154.6 million. We had the structure in the revenue stream to be able to pay for it. Now, it wasn't going to happen. At the end of the day, we ended up with about $48 million in what I would call structural tax relief, or about 0.05% [*sic*] of that $10.6 billion budget.

I could talk about the loss of federal matching funds in several budget lines for the drinking water program, we reduced those by $5.5 million. That's going to amount to $30 million less in federal matching money. I could talk about Part I. If anybody wants an exercise in reading Statutes and understanding what they look like, look at Title 5, Chapter 142. It explains explicitly how the process must go to exceed the Statutory budget limitation cap that was put in place in 2005. There are a whole host of other things; the paid family medical leave, the tax on our businesses; that I can't support. And then the other thing was, as we talked about several weeks ago, when we do things in the middle of the night, it just doesn't feel right. Well, imagine what it felt like voting for this budget at quarter of four in the morning. Imagine what it felt like voting for this budget with four or five Amendments that we didn't have anything in front of us to read, we just had them read to us. And then, there were several that we had the paperwork given to us and we had scant minutes to read it before we had to vote on it.

So, a lot of my objection is process, a lot of my objection is negotiating. I struggle with the fact, because I've done a lot of negotiating in my life, I struggle with the fact that this entire negotiation has been one of we've been negotiating with ourselves. We started at $400 million, now we can't have $400 million, so, we'll negotiate ourselves down to $200 million. Two hundred million's not going to happen, so, we negotiate ourselves down to $154 million. Because we're trying to do the right thing for the people of Maine. We tax them too much. All we're trying to do is structural tax relief. It's not going to happen, my apologies to the people of Maine, but that's what elections are for. Thank you.

The SPEAKER: The Chair recognizes the Representative from Winter Harbor, Representative Faulkingham.

Representative **FAULKINGHAM**: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to explain how I plan on voting and how I came to that decision today. I need to start with what I feel the role of the minority party is when the Legislature is controlled by the majority of the other party. I think it's our job to always do the best we can for the people of Maine, in our opinion, and that means staying at the table until the very end. And when the majority budget was passed in the, actually, previous Session, we knew there'd be a supplemental budget and we stayed at the table and I give full credit to my Appropriations Members for staying involved. But throughout this Special Session we've been in, it has been clear that the majority party did not want to negotiate with us. All the signals we were getting was that a majority budget was happening. And those signals remained until nearly the very end. And, as the Good Representative from Madison just said, it was an episode in negotiating against yourself and that's what we went through. It was throwing out offer after offer and getting nothing but zero in response, which was very frustrating, and we tried. I know I tried and I know my Appropriations Members tried to stay engaged in this process throughout. And until at the very end, it became almost desperate to see if we couldn't pull something out of this. And then, in one last act of desperation, the pension deduction bill was thrown out and in the eleventh hour, that was adopted, which was great. That is an awesome thing for the people of Maine and I'm very pleased to see it in the budget.

There are other good things in this budget, I'm not going to say there aren't. But at the end of the day, it felt less like a majority party trying to negotiate and cooperate with us than a majority party that was seeing how little we would accept, which is very unfortunate and I really wish I could go back weeks. I wish I could back this up because God knows, I have tried and my Appropriations Members have tried. But everything we've done has seemed to fall on deaf ears. We as a caucus have very carefully considered this supplemental budget, and I'm not kidding you, right up until this morning, at length, at length discussing the pros and cons. And there are pros. But it's really hard to get past some of the cons. The paid family medical leave is going to be a huge tax burden on the workers of the State of Maine. It is hard to look past that. It's hard to look past the amount of money that the State is spending without giving more substantial tax relief. And at the end of the day, it pains me to walk away but I don't feel like we're walking away, I feel like we got walked away from long ago. And that is the point we are at now, Madam Speaker. If you've got a solution, I'd take it. If you've got a way out of this, I'd listen. I always listen. I listen to the very end. I listen to you, I listen to the other side, but at the end of the day, I listen to my caucus and I answer to them and this budget is too important to come in for just a little bit of scraps at the table. And as Kenny Rogers famously said, you got to know when to hold 'em and you have to know when to fold 'em. Madam Speaker, we've come to that point and I believe it is time to fold 'em and I believe you'll see my caucus voting in a block against this motion. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The SPEAKER: The Chair recognizes the Representative from Auburn, Representative Libby.

Representative **LIBBY**: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, Sir Alexander Fraser Tytler, born 1747, died 1813, said this; A democracy is always temporary in nature.

It simply cannot exist as a permanent form of government. A democracy will continue to exist up until the time that voters discover they can vote themselves generous gifts from the public treasury. From that moment on, the majority always votes for the candidates who promise the most benefits from the public treasury, with the result that every democracy will finally collapse due to loose fiscal policy which is always followed by a dictatorship.

The average age of the world's greatest civilizations from the beginning of history has been about 200 years. During those 200 years, these nations always progressed through the following sequence. From bondage to spiritual faith, from spiritual faith to great courage, from courage to liberty, Madam Speaker. From liberty to abundance, from abundance to selfishness, from selfishness to complacency, from complacency to apathy, from apathy to dependence, from dependence back into bondage. Madam Speaker, with this supplemental budget, we slip further into the category of dependence into bondage.

We are seeing a radical record increase in government spending with the biennial budget and this supplemental budget, Madam Speaker, when we're facing record inflation. Maine families are struggling and we are appropriating another $445 million in spending. This is unsustainable. We are burdening our families, we are burdening Maine businesses, we are burdening our future generations with massive tax liabilities. Government doesn't go backwards. We don't shrink budgets, Madam Speaker, and we're doing so to fulfill the wish list of the moment. This budget, now over $10.3 billion; this is a historic budget and a historic moment, Madam Speaker, but not in a good way. This budget is bad for Maine citizens, it's bad for Maine businesses and it's bad for Maine's future. If I were to vote for this budget, Madam Speaker; myself, personally; I would be voting to speed along Maine's future to a socialist dystopia.

If that weren't bad enough, Madam Speaker, let's chalk another one up to another lie on the campaign trail of the Chief Executive regarding paid family leave. You know, I read the op-ed that was published by the Chief Executive, Madam Speaker, and I was struck by one piece of that op-ed, in particular. That one would flip on a campaign promise based on the premise that something is inevitable or a done deal, not because it's good policy for Maine, not because it benefits Maine families or is good for Maine businesses, but simply because there is an outside entity putting forward a ballot initiative. Madam Speaker, thank goodness that we are a separate branch of government. Let's instead consider the merits of the policy itself rather than whether someone is putting forward a ballot initiative for paid family leave.

With record State revenues, there is zero; zero reason to be raising taxes and that, Madam Speaker, is what this supplemental budget does; implementing a new payroll tax. The damage that will be produced from this government spending; and let's call it what it is, taxation, taking from Maine people; and the increased burdens that these new mandates will cause will far outweigh any positives that might come from the new initiatives included in this supplemental budget. I did hear this one, though, Madam Speaker; but Laurel, what about the increased child tax credit? You know, Madam Speaker, if the government didn't take so much from the Maine people in the first place, then perhaps we wouldn't need a tax credit increase that's the equivalent of a redistribution of wealth. I can only hope that my colleagues on this side of the aisle will not support this budget in hopes of obtaining crumbs from the majority party.

It is perhaps inevitable, Madam Speaker, that this supplemental budget will pass, but it will do so without my support and I take comfort in this, Madam Speaker; at some point, we as a society, we will continue to progress through the sequence outlined by Sir Tytler and someday, hopefully soon, we will pass from dependency and bondage to spiritual faith and then to great courage and, finally, back to liberty. Follow my light.

The SPEAKER: The Chair recognizes the Representative from Freeport, Representative Sachs.

Representative **SACHS**: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise in support of the pending motion. I want to begin by thanking my colleagues on the Appropriations Committee from both sides of the aisle, particularly the Good Representative from Waterford, for their hard work on this budget. We started and ended this process together, actually, with a clear focus to build a budget which addresses our most pressing needs, invests in the future and provides opportunities for every member of our Maine community. It is true that some of my colleagues on the Appropriations Committee chose not to come until after the change package and the revenue forecast, but that's okay. Some of us really did do a deep dive into every single line of this budget, Madam Speaker, and eventually, we worked together to pass a budget; yes, in the wee hours of the morning; for a budget that does help all Mainers.

The initiatives in LD 258 concentrate on both short-term needs and long-term solutions. Housing, which is a bipartisan issue, is one such area that reflects this strategy. This budget includes funding for emergency shelters and homeless youth support, it funds transitional housing and enhanced voucher benefits, it creates a housing first program to help those chronically unhoused with both social supports and permanent housing. And it invests in building affordable housing in both rural and urban areas so that we can address the long-term needs across our State.

Funding for the Judicial Branch and legal services is another area where historic investments are made on a bipartisan basis. We continued the work we began together in the supplemental budget to invest in the Maine Commission on Indigent Legal Services, and in this budget increased funding for judges, clerks, mediators and other services to address the backlog of cases. Access to justice is a constitutional requirement and this budget reflects the urgency and priority that this Committee felt back in the supplemental, through the Part 1, and now in the Part 2 budget, which should be addressed to both meet the short-term crisis as well as long-term stability.

Environmental stewardship, Madam Speaker, is another area to celebrate in this budget. Investing in the future of clean energy, while funding the ongoing immediate needs to mitigate PFAS contamination, are both found in this budget. And, yes, historic investments leveraging significant federal match will help protect our drinking water, wastewater and stormwater infrastructures. Renewing support for our very popular community resilience grants, which folks on both sides of the aisle and their communities have taken advantage of, will continue to ensure that our local towns can meet their climate goals in ways that meet their individual needs both now and in the future.

Some of the most important work we did together in this budget is investing in families. A historic level of funding for child care, both for workers as well as for families, is in this budget. The new State refundable dependent tax credit indexed to inflation will help lift children out of poverty. Services for at-risk youth including high-fidelity wraparound services, parenting, mental health resources and child welfare supports are all

included in this budget. Enhanced SNAP benefits, expanded children's health insurance programs and funding of school-based oral health program all help families thrive.

But businesses and workforce development at all levels are also part of this budget, Madam Speaker. The new Dirigo program invests in workers as well as in capital improvements, with an eye to increasing GDP in ways that reflect the emerging landscapes of diverse industries. Programs to support workers from high school to retirement age to those with disabilities are included in this budget to ensure that everyone who would like to enter the workforce can do so with a competitive edge. Health care loan repayment programs, enhanced investments in research and development, an apprenticeship program and, yes, the new paid family leave program are all incredible investments in the future of Maine's workforce.

There are substantial supports in this budget for older Mainers as well. Levels of funding not seen for Meals on Wheels, legal services for the elderly and connections to services to help folks stay in their homes safely and comfortably are in this budget. Over $20 million is included for nursing facilities, veterans' homes and PNMIs or group homes, to make sure that the right level of care is available for Mainers who need these critical services. And a brand-new program is included which will leverage significant federal dollars and help pay the Medicare premiums for over 30,000 lower-income seniors here in Maine.

And let's not forget over $600 million of tax relief included in this budget, which is targeted to lower- and middle-class income families and older Mainers. The Tax Committee passed many unanimous bipartisan tax relief bills and they're reflected in this budget today. Responsible, targeted tax relief is something both parties can support and do support and we do so in this budget.

I could go on. The investments in education at K-12, community college and university levels; the significant resources in outpatient, inpatient and recovery services for those with substance use disorders; the $31 million in emergency medical services, particularly for units in rural areas; the new lifespan waiver program and resources to not only eliminate the waitlist for the first time but to also provide individual services for those adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. These are all in this budget.

I note again that this budget is based on often unanimous report-backs from every single budget initiative and the overwhelming bipartisan agreement on so many of the bills that are included. This is a reflection of our shared priorities, both short-term and long-term. So much more unites us than divides us. I urge this Body to be united once again and support the pending motion. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The SPEAKER: The Chair recognizes the Representative from Waterford, Representative Millett.

Representative **MILLETT**: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and Ladies and Gentlemen of the House. I believe my Floor Leader and two of my Appropriations Republican colleagues have kind of conveyed the message that I'm feeling that my caucus wants all of us here in the Chamber to hear this morning; that we feel that this process that we have followed, the product that is before us and its tendency to grow State government is well beyond our ability to see a way to a two-thirds majority here today.

I want to try to stress the things that have gone through my mind as the Appropriations Committee lead Republican and my long years of trying to get to a yes on budgets of this type. I started the month in December feeling good about my new colleagues, getting to know a few, knowing that we had a big issue on winter energy relief that the people in the other Body felt needed a hearing. We did that, with your leadership, Madam Speaker, and by mid-January, we came together on LD 3 and enacted it with a super-majority. I went on the Maine Development Foundation bus tour and found a lot of, I would say, new people of both parties and the Independents as well, that I felt we could work together. And that was stressed as a theme early in the Session and repeatedly not only by yourself, Madam Speaker, but by several ministers who have gotten my attention in the morning prayer, that we can be larger than the sum of our parts. We can, by working together, accomplish more than we can by finger-pointing and demonizing each other and trying to outmaneuver each other in the process of hardball politics. That's not what I'm all about and I'm trying to think of ways to paint the picture that some of the other Members of my party have spoken to this morning a little bit differently. And in that regard, I would like to say that my focus has always been on growing the Maine economy and not growing State Government. That investments in our infrastructure, including technology and our roads and bridges, is a pathway to improving commerce, tourism and everything that's good about bringing jobs to the Maine economy and helping more and more people who are struggling to make ends meet have better jobs, better employment, better support systems, even better housing and better child care. Those are futuristic things that I think are important that we not lose sight of here this morning.

I think that the things that I would point to, some have not really seen or felt the same optimism that I feel. We have done something with the Highway Fund that few people would have expected we could do by making it sustainable, by giving us a pathway to the future and authorizing roads and bridges work far beyond what has ever occurred in my time here in Augusta. We've done some things within this budget that are futuristic and important. The simple passage of LD 7, the tax conformity bill out of our Taxation Committee, with unanimity paints the pathway to a situation in the out-biennium, 2026 and 2027, whereby the people who serve in this Chamber then and the people we represent back home will be denied the possibility of a $346 million tax increase. That is no small measure and I think it bears some mention today that that piece was early voted into the budget and done so with bipartisan fingerprints.

A third thing, and my Floor Leader said it eloquently, we've done things with the $48 million of tax relief that I think will pay dividends down the road. And we had started with this notion that what we wanted to do was to give low- and middle-income people more disposable income by not overtaxing them and leaving them with more money that they could decide how they wish to spend it in support of their family and their own well-being. I think that's something that's going to pay dividends for the elder population as well, because if you think about it, we made a stride in the 130th that few people have really caught onto when we improved the pension deductibility under the Maine income tax from $10K to $25K in the tax year we just reported on, to $30K next year and $35K the year following. This bill alone will create a parity with Social Security for those who are living on pension income when they reach the age of retirement and are trying to keep as much of their money in their own hands rather than turning it over to government. That $43, $44, $45,000 exemption of the Maine income tax in 2026 will be, I think, a lot of help to a lot of people, maybe even some of the snow birds who've worked here and struggled to get to a pension but have felt the need to go elsewhere, where their income would not be taxed, might even be encouraged to stay here and a few might even choose to come back home.

So, I think of those things and I think of one little compromise in the budget that's before us and it may not be little, it maybe turns out to be big, the Dirigo business incentive program. We did work together to make it acceptable, affordable and to replace a time-worn and inadequate Pine Tree Zone program that will offer incentives to entrepreneurs, investors in Maine's economy, and people that create jobs to keep more money and see more development and more jobs and more skilled employees finding good jobs here in Maine.

So, I will stop with that and say I will be voting for this budget after Committee Amendment adoption, pending any further Amendments that take it in a pathway that I can accept for engrossment, and probably for enactment, just because I feel in my conscience that is my role. As the lead and as a stubborn old Mainer, I feel I want to and did stay at the table until 4:00 in the morning last Wednesday morning, the 28th of June, and I will stay there and hope that, as we get together and when we come back in January and we see a new revenue forecast and we see what the economy has done under our watch, that we may even get back together and start talking with each other and not negotiating against ourselves. So, with that thought, I would hope that, and I know that the House Chair will be offering a technical Amendment. I urge her to make sure that you all understand it so we know what we're voting on, and there may or may not be other substantive Amendments, but we're here to do a task and I want to see it done. So, Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The SPEAKER: A roll call has been ordered. The pending question before the House is Acceptance of the Majority Ought to Pass as Amended Report. All those in favor will vote yes, those opposed will vote no.

ROLL CALL NO. 350

YEA - Abdi, Ankeles, Arford, Bell, Boyle, Brennan, Bridgeo, Cloutier, Cluchey, Collings, Copeland, Crafts, Craven, Crockett, Dhalac, Dill, Dodge, Doudera, Eaton, Fay, Gattine, Geiger, Gere, Golek, Graham, Gramlich, Hasenfus, Hepler, Jauch, Kessler, Kuhn, Lajoie, Landry, LaRochelle, Lee, Lookner, Madigan, Malon, Mastraccio, Mathieson, Matlack, Meyer, Millett H, Milliken, Montell, Moonen, Moriarty, Murphy, O'Neil, Osher, Paulhus, Perry A, Perry J, Pluecker, Pringle, Rana, Reckitt, Rielly, Riseman, Roberts, Roeder, Runte, Russell, Sachs, Salisbury, Sargent, Sayre, Shagoury, Sheehan, Skold, Stover, Supica, Terry, Warren, White B, Williams, Worth, Zager, Zeigler, Madam Speaker.

NAY - Albert, Arata, Ardell, Babin, Bagshaw, Blier, Boyer, Bradstreet, Campbell, Carlow, Carmichael, Collamore, Costain, Cray, Cyrway, Davis, Drinkwater, Ducharme, Dunphy, Faulkingham, Foster, Fredericks, Gifford, Greenwood, Griffin, Guerrette, Henderson, Hymes, Jackson, Javner, Lanigan, Lavigne, Lemelin, Libby, Lyman, Mason, Morris, Ness, Nutting, Parry, Paul, Perkins, Poirier, Polewarczyk, Pomerleau, Quint, Sampson, Schmersal-Burgess, Simmons, Soboleski, Strout, Swallow, Thorne, Underwood, Walker, White J, Wood, Woodsome.

ABSENT - Adams, Andrews, Galletta, Haggan, Hall, Hobbs, Millett R, Newman, O'Connell, Rudnicki, Shaw, Smith, Theriault.

Yes, 80; No, 58; Absent, 13; Vacant, 0; Excused, 0.

80 having voted in the affirmative and 58 voted in the negative, with 13 being absent, and accordingly the Majority **Ought to Pass as Amended** Report was **ACCEPTED**.

The Bill was **READ ONCE**. **Committee Amendment "A" (H-717)** was **READ** by the Clerk.

Representative SACHS of Freeport **PRESENTED House Amendment "A" (H-721)** to **Committee Amendment "A" (H-717)**, which was **READ** by the Clerk.

The SPEAKER: The Chair recognizes the Representative from Freeport, Representative Sachs.

Representative **SACHS**: Thank you, Madam Speaker. For every 402-page bill, a few small errors will fall. This Amendment corrects an error in Part A of the bill by moving the General Fund appropriation from child care services, it should've been in the Head Start program. It corrects an error in Part A also of moving a few deallocations from funding and also the Amendment includes a technical change to language in the bill that has no fiscal impact. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Subsequently, **House Amendment "A" (H-721)** to **Committee Amendment "A" (H-717)** was **ADOPTED**.

Representative SACHS of Freeport **PRESENTED House Amendment "B" (H-722)** to **Committee Amendment "A" (H-717)**, which was **READ** by the Clerk.

The SPEAKER: The Chair recognizes the Representative from Freeport, Representative Sachs.

Representative **SACHS**: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This Amendment simply strips the emergency from the bill. Thank you.

Subsequently, **House Amendment "B" (H-722)** to **Committee Amendment "A" (H-717)** was **ADOPTED**.

Committee Amendment "A" (H-717) as Amended by House Amendment "A" (H-721) and House Amendment "B" (H-722) thereto was **ADOPTED**.

Under suspension of the rules the Bill was given its **SECOND READING WITHOUT REFERENCE** to the Committee on **Bills in the Second Reading**.

Under further suspension of the rules the Bill was **PASSED TO BE ENGROSSED as Amended by Committee Amendment "A" (H-717) as Amended by House Amendment "A" (H-721) and House Amendment "B" (H-722)** thereto and sent for concurrence.

ORDERED SENT FORTHWITH.

The following items were taken up out of order by unanimous consent:

SENATE PAPERS

Bill "An Act to Authorize Funding for Collective Bargaining Agreements with Certain Judicial Department Employees" (EMERGENCY)

(S.P. 843) (L.D. 2019)

Committee on **APPROPRIATIONS AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS** suggested and ordered printed.

Came from the Senate, under suspension of the rules and **WITHOUT REFERENCE** to a Committee, the Bill **READ TWICE** and **PASSED TO BE ENGROSSED**.

Speaker TALBOT ROSS of Portland moved that the rules be **SUSPENDED** for the purpose of giving the Bill its **FIRST READING WITOUT REFERENCE** to a Committee.

The SPEAKER: The Chair recognizes the Representative from Waterford, Representative Millett.

Representative **MILLETT**: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll be very brief. This is the second collective bargaining agreement that has been presented here in the Chamber without comment from anyone in the 151 of us and I would wonder if it might be worth at least hearing what this contract and the one that we sent to the other Body last week does for our employees. Generally, we serve as the approving, ratifying Body for collective bargaining contracts and for State employees and the courts. We've been doing this for now 50 years. It would