MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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Senate Legislative Record

One Hundred and Thirty-First Legislature

State of Maine

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Second Regular Session

Beginning January 3, 2024

Beginning with Page S-1593

RECESSED until the sound of the bell.

After Recess the Senate was called to order by the President.

Out of order and under suspension of the Rules, the Senate considered the following:

PAPERS FROM THE HOUSE

Non-Concurrent Matter

An Act to Make Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds and to Change Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025
H.P. 1420 L.D. 2214

In Senate, April 17, 2024, the Majority **OUGHT TO PASS AS AMENDED BY COMMITTEE AMENDMENT "A" (H-985)** Report **READ** and **ACCEPTED** and the Bill **PASSED TO BE ENGROSSED AS AMENDED BY COMMITTEE AMENDMENT "A" (H-985) AS AMENDED BY HOUSE AMENDMENT "B" (H-989) AND SENATE AMENDMENT "F" (S-730)** thereto in **NON-CONCURRENCE**.

Comes from the House, **PASSED TO BE ENGROSSED AS AMENDED BY COMMITTEE AMENDMENT "A" (H-985) AS AMENDED BY HOUSE AMENDMENTS "B" (H-989) AND "C" (H-990)** thereto in **NON-CONCURRENCE**.

Senator **VITELLI** of Sagadahoc moved the Senate **RECEDE** and **CONCUR**.

On motion by Senator **STEWART** of Aroostook, supported by a Division of one-fifth of the members present and voting, a Roll Call was ordered.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from Penobscot, Senator Tipping.

Senator **TIPPING**: Thank you, Mr. President. I will be voting to recede and concur, but I just wanted to note, maybe peel back the curtain a little bit on one of the issues that's been at the heart of this drama and say that I'm very disappointed that this does not include the language for retention and recruitment for state workers. I think those of us that have served on the Government Oversight Committee, like those in many committees, have seen what happens when specific parts of state government atrophy and are turned from helping people into hurting them. I believe this relatively simple language to allow a third-party moderator to step in in certain cases when things have gotten really bad was a pretty simple step. I think it's unfortunate that we're not taking it, but I will be voting very soon to concur. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from Penobscot, Senator Baldacci.

Senator **BALDACCI**: Thank you, Mr. President. I want to first concur with the remarks from my fellow Senator from Penobscot. I am, too, disappointed regarding how the -- our state employees have been dealt with in this process. They deserve much better, and I'm committed, as others are, to making sure that happens at some point. I did want to just briefly go over there are several important things that are happening in this budget in terms of Health and Human Services, and I just briefly wanted to share, you know, good news with this caucus, which includes that we had -- we rejected the proposed repeal of the income eligibility expansion for the Medicare beneficiary program. That's $54 million that's going to go to seniors making up to $50,000 per household or less to help them with their prescription drugs. Then, there's also a total of 80 million for nursing homes in this budget, there's a total of $38 million in pay increases for care workers. There's a little over $3 million in increased pay for DHHS caseworkers, there's eight and a half million to keep St. Mary's Regional Hospital operating, which is a hugely important healthcare institution for western Maine, six million for supporting victims of crime, and just two -- two really kind of different efforts that haven't been done before, one is that there's two million for development of a psychiatric residential treatment facility for adolescents. This state right now sends our young people with severe behavioral problems out of state, and that's really -- that's not good for them, their families, their treatment. We haven't had an in-state facility for many, many, many years. So, our hope is to work with a provider who can provide us with a facility, someplace like Sweetser or another qualified provider. It will be a huge step forward for us to be able to not send our kids out of state and to offer quality decent treatment here in our state. And then the last thing is $2 million for grants for physical and mental health services for public safety employees. Our committee heard significant testimony from firefighters, paramedics, police officers about the unique and constant stresses of the job. So, this money is to hopefully go out in competitive grants to local departments to promote health screens, preventative medicine, other wellness type programs for our public safety workers. There's a lot of good things in this budget, there's a lot of improvements that will be made, hospital rate reform, which has taken several years, is coming more to fruition with this budget and with the biennium budget but also this budget and the change package, because hospitals will be receiving significantly more money, and hopefully helping to lead our hospitals closer to the black. Those are all good things for us and for our state and for our fellow citizens. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from Cumberland, Senator Nangle.

Senator **NANGLE**: Thank you, Mr. President, good morning. I feel like we have a choice here of either -- actually, not an either -- a choice of standing in the frying pan and in the fire. We voted earlier and passed an amendment that would've made important investments in the state's workforce, that would've given larger investments to our nursing homes and our veterans homes and school support staff and better assist those in recovery. But it's clear that all those investments are not the will of the majority here in the Capitol. So, what do we do? Do we not pass a budget that everyone that has everything of my priority and others

or do we pass a budget that does make concrete steps towards having steps towards supporting housing, strong investments for school support staff, just not as much as I would like, maintains the pension exemptions for retirees in the state and as my friend from Penobscot said, maintains the Medicare choice program. I won't make perfection the enemy of completion. Not passing the budget is not an option. I, too, will vote recede and concur.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from Kennebec, Senator Pouliot.

Senator **POULIOT**: Thank you, Mr. President. Not passing the budget is actually an option, despite what we just heard. We could choose to vote no and move forward without passing a budget this evening. So, I just wanted the record to be clear about that. I know that everyone in this Chamber is feeling quite a bit frustrated, and so am I, too. It's kind of interesting how we've gotten to this point where this majority will that was spoke of has been literally rammed through and then now, we're kind of grumbling about a few little things on the edge here at the last moment. So, for me, Mr. President, I'm pretty frustrated this evening around this vote, as I know you are, too, Mr. President, and I hope that moving forward there will be an opportunity in this body and in this institution to get back to a time of more collaboration. I think back to the time, Mr. President, when I was sworn in to this Body, this Chamber, it was the same time that you became the president. And my dad was here, actually, to watch me get sworn in to the Senate, and he heard your speech when you became President. And I'll never forget afterwards he said wow, that guy, he really cares about the people, you know? And I'll never forget, it was -- included a story about the river up in the Allagash, the St. John River, and I've been up there a time or two, Mr. President, I've stood at the side of that river and I've looked across it to the other side in Canada, and couldn't help but think, you know, how they have a whole bunch of different rules over there and a lot of different laws and how they get impacted is a lot different than we are, and the only thing that separates us from them is this, you know, body of water. Yet, for some reason, I don't know why, it seems that that river that we all have to navigate has gotten a lot more rocks in it over the years, Mr. President, since you and I both started -- or, well, you started before I did, but since I started in this Chamber with you, and it's really concerning, you know, I have the same concerns that you shared as we wrap up our time here. It's not about who wins or loses with this budget or whatever, it's more about the process, you know, it's more about making sure that all people as part of the process are heard and that their voice is valued. And to be honest with you, Mr. President, these last two years have been quite frustrating, you know, because we have conversations that go on and then the realization in the end, just like this evening, is, you know, the votes are there. So, it's just the way it's going to be. And I'm sure you're feeling some of that frustration yourself, Mr. President, and I sure am, too, and I just hope that, you know, as we wrap up our work here and those Members who are coming back in the future, you know, hopefully we can give some consideration more to all sides of the issue and bring back that collaboration because democracy in this country is an experiment, Mr. President, and the experiment will fail if we don't find ways to value all the voices and make sure they're all heard at the table. Thank you, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair would just like to respond to Senator Pouliot. Once again, I almost started to cry, talking about -- or him talking about the river, and I think it's just to the point where I just want to go home and see the river.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from Oxford, Senator Keim.

Senator **KEIM**: Thank you, Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Senate. As we had this bill described to us, the budget described to us earlier, I heard words like common sense and collaboration and responsible budget. And then, you know, resources are limited and so we have to, you know, judiciously move them around. And I think that given that there's been an excess in our budget every single year for the last -- every single session for the last several, the resources that are limited are the taxpayers of Maine. Their resources are limited, and they are the forgotten ones. We take more and more and more from the taxpayers and spend more and more on whatever project we think happens to be more important than actually just letting them keep the money in their own pocketbook. We're the fourth highest taxed state in the nation, and we just keep spending more and more money, and we're taking it right out of the pockets of Maine people. And we don't care because it's another majority budget. I'll be voting against this motion and this budget.

THE PRESIDENT: The pending question before the Senate is to Recede and Concur. A roll call has been ordered. Is the Senate ready for the question?

The Doorkeepers secured the Chamber.

The Secretary opened the vote.

ROLL CALL (#784)

YEAS: Senators: BAILEY, BALDACCI, BEEBE-CENTER, BRENNER, CARNEY, CHIPMAN, CURRY, DAUGHTRY, DUSON, HICKMAN, INGWERSON, LAWRENCE, NANGLE, RAFFERTY, RENY, ROTUNDO, TIPPING, VITELLI, PRESIDENT JACKSON

NAYS: Senators: BENNETT, BLACK, BRAKEY, FARRIN, GROHOSKI, GUERIN, HARRINGTON, KEIM, LIBBY, LYFORD, MOORE, POULIOT, STEWART, TIMBERLAKE

EXCUSED: Senators: LAFOUNTAIN, PIERCE

19 Senator having voted in the affirmative and 14 Senators having voted in the negative, with 2 Senators being excused, the motion by Senator **VITELLI** of Sagadahoc to **RECEDE** from **PASSAGE TO BE ENGROSSED AS AMENDED BY COMMITTEE AMENDMENT "A" (H-985) AS AMENDED BY HOUSE AMENDMENT "B" (H-989) AND SENATE AMENDMENT "F" (S-730)** thereto and **CONCRUR** with **PASSAGE TO BE ENGROSSED BY COMMITTEE AMENDMENT "A" (H-985) AS AMENDED BY HOUSE AMENDMENTS "B" (H-989) AND "C" (H-990)** thereto, **PREVAILED**.