



# Senator Justin CHENETTE

DISTRICT 31

Proudly Representing the People of Saco, Old Orchard Beach,  
Hollis, Limington, and Part of Buxton.

Dear Friend,

Between my town halls, in-district office hours, community events and phone calls with constituents throughout our district, I can say one thing with confidence: Mainers aren't asking for much. All we want is a fair shot at a good life. The opportunity to earn a solid living, send our kids to college and retire with dignity and financial security. The idea of the American Dream right here in Vacationland, where it truly is the way life should be.

Throughout this past legislative session, Senate Democrats took our Opportunity Agenda message on the road, holding meetings across our state. Our plan was simple: Lower property taxes. An economy that provides good-paying jobs. Well-funded public schools and affordable college education. A health care system that puts patients and families first. This was the starting post in our budget negotiations.

This session was the longest in the history of the Maine Legislature. We considered 1,646 substantive pieces of legislation, and enacted 312 new laws. Here are some key accomplishments:

- The biennial budget includes \$162 million in new public education funding. Nearly every school district is receiving more state funding as

a result, including Saco, RSU 23, and MSAD 6.

- The Homestead Property Tax Exemption, which I believe is one of the best property tax relief programs, will grow by 33 percent, bringing the total exemption up to \$20,000.
- We updated our mining rules to protect Maine's clean air and water from the potential dangers of large-scale metallic mining.
- We invested in public health infrastructure and increased support for the hardworking men and women who care for our senior loved ones, which I believe will improve the health of our communities.

Our work is far from over, but this newsletter will give you an update about the progress we've made.

As always, I look forward to hearing from you. I give out my personal cell phone for a reason: you're my boss. Call or text me at 207-590-3266 or email [justin.chenette@legislature.maine.gov](mailto:justin.chenette@legislature.maine.gov). However you choose to contact me, being responsive to you is important.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve you and our community at the State House.

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## Ongoing drug crisis demands continued response in Augusta

The drug crisis continues to kill about one Mainer every day. I sponsored a bill to provide nearly \$1 million annually to the York County Jail to offer substance abuse therapy to inmates. The goal is to help inmates recover from addiction, thus preventing recidivism and helping them get their lives back on track. If this pilot project is successful, it can be replicated in other counties. This bill passed, and awaits funding from the Appropriations Committee.

**We also allocated nearly \$5 million in the budget for opioid addiction treatment for those without health insurance, and created an Opioid Task Force to find solutions to this ongoing tragedy.**

This problem won't be solved overnight, but these are steps forward to fight addiction and save lives.

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## Community leadership — Beyond under the dome

My passion for helping others extends far beyond the State House dome. **I believe it's the responsibility of our elected officials to provide leadership right here at home and set a positive example for those in our community. Here are a few highlights of that commitment:**

- I run the Saco Bay Center for Civic Engagement, a nonprofit organization that provides college scholarships to local students, grants to arts programs in local schools, and supports homeless veterans through education and job training.
- As a board member of Saco Main Street, I help promote downtown development and organize community events.
- As Vice President of Friends of the Ballpark, I've worked to revitalize the Old Orchard Beach Ballpark for future families to enjoy.
- I'm proud to volunteer every Thanksgiving at Most Holy Trinity Church, where those in need can come for good fellowship and a hot meal.
- I'm also an active member of the Saco Bay Rotary Club, Buxton-Hollis Historical Society, Saco Grange, and the Old Orchard Beach Chamber of Commerce.



Throwing out the first pitch at the Old Orchard Beach Surge game.

## Mental health care to support the veterans who gave so much

Undiagnosed and untreated mental health problems are a real threat to our veterans, with far too many Maine servicemen and women in need of mental health care. For those with a mental health challenge, finding support can be extremely difficult. **The Legislature took an important step this session to improve mental health care for Maine veterans.**

A new law will cover the cost of mental health care for service members, help cut dangerous wait times for those in crisis and gather data about the number of veterans who need care. This law goes a long way toward preventing those veterans, who gave so much, from falling through the cracks.



Reading to 1st graders at Young School in Saco.

## Government accountable to you, not special interests

Government should be “of the people, by the people, for the people.” **As a member of the Senate Committee on Conduct & Ethics, I supported two bills to strengthen and protect the tenets of good government.**

The first was a bill I sponsored to ban the system of “pay to play” that sees lobbyists and corporations pour millions of dollars into Maine’s political system in the form of contributions to candidates for the Legislature or governor. State law currently blocks such donations only during the legislative session while allowing them the rest of the year, but I believe money can corrupt and influence our political process no matter the time of year.

The second bill — supported by the Maine Citizens for Clean Elections — would prohibit a legislative candidate from establishing political action committees, which take thousands of dollars from lobbyists, corporations, and special interest groups to spend on our elections. I will continue to fight for government that is accountable to you, not special interests.



With Rep. Don Marean of Hollis, honoring the 100th anniversary of the Hollis Center Church.

## Relief for Mainers feeling the pinch of high property taxes

As the lead Senate Democrat on the Taxation Committee, I worked with my colleagues from both parties for responsible tax policy. Property tax relief was a priority this session.

**The Legislature blocked the governor's plan to eliminate the Homestead Property Tax Exemption for Mainers under 65 years old. Instead, we successfully negotiated for all homeowners to see a 33 percent increase in the Homestead Exemption this year.**

I also sponsored a bill to bolster the Property Tax Fairness Credit for low- and middle-income Mainers. This credit has provided direct relief for homeowners and renters, and my bill would have increased the maximum credit available.

While this bill did not pass, I will continue to look for ways to lower the property tax burden on Mainers.

## Defending the referendum results, and the voters' will

Mainers approved several significant laws at the ballot box in 2016, and many of those referendum results fell under attack this legislative session.

**I fought every step of the way to defend the will of the voters.**

A voter-approved law to increase the minimum wage, starting at \$9 per hour this year and reaching \$12 per hour in 2020, was subject to several bills designed to weaken or repeal the law. No one who works full time should live in poverty, so I fought to protect the increase of the minimum wage and am proud to say that it will continue to rise, just as voters demanded.

I defended the voter-approved 3 percent surcharge on the highest income earners to fully fund public education. Unfortunately, a budget amendment I sponsored to keep the surcharge was unsuccessful.

Voters also approved ranked-choice voting. I believe Mainers want us to lead the nation by creating an electoral system that prioritizes civility and allows voters to cast their ballots for the candidate or candidates they truly prefer — not just the one they believed could win.

I helped block an effort to repeal ranked-choice voting, and will continue to fight to do everything in my power to salvage as much of RCV as possible.

## Increased school funding is an investment in Maine's future

**After months of difficult negotiations, the Legislature increased funding for K-12 education by \$162 million over the next two years.**

While the budget guarantees additional funding for nearly every school district — including Saco, RSU 23, and MSAD 6 — it is a short-term solution to the chronic underfunding of our local schools in Augusta. We'll have to revisit this problem again in two years, at which point I hope we finally adopt a stable, ongoing means of paying for public education and subsequently reducing property taxes.

The budget also increased funding for the University of Maine System and Maine Community College System by \$15.6 million so that our public colleges and universities can continue to help young Mainers become successful, responsible citizens.

Lastly, we took aim at student debt, a financial crisis affecting an entire generation of Mainers and Americans. Many economists argue that this crushing debt is hampering the economy.

Maine has one of the highest student debt averages in the country. I supported student debt relief for people who choose to live and work in Maine. By forgiving

all or some of a resident worker's debt, we would free that Mainer's income to be spent in the local economy.

The program would require participants to live and work in Maine for at least five years. If they don't, they'd be required to pay the state back for payments made on their behalf.

This bill earned bipartisan support, and will be considered in next year's legislative session.



Presenting a legislative sentiment to Valedictorian Annabel Winterberg of Thornton Academy.

2017 Legislative Update  
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## At a glance: Sen. Justin Chenette in 2017

### COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS

- Joint Standing Committee on Taxation
- Senate Committee on Ethics and Conduct

### BILLS INTRODUCED THIS YEAR

- Incentivize downtown start-up businesses
- Support drug treatment to relieve overcrowding at county jails
- Expand property tax fairness program
- Promote student debt relief
- Close the revolving door, where politicians cash out by becoming lobbyists.
- Ban lawmakers from taking special interest money through their PACs.
- Establish a process to recall public officials

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**Email me or visit my website above to sign up for regular updates through my email newsletter.**

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- Schedule a visit to the State House: Students can shadow or be an Honorary Page for a day.
    - Look for future in-district office hours in my communications and my newspaper column