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2014 Legislative Update

Stewardship of our environment and natural resources-based economy

Future generations should be able to benefit from Maine's beautiful environment and bountiful natural resources, which when preserved help our economy and our well-being. Bills passed this past session include:

- Creating a solar energy plan so Maine can benefit from renewable energy and the related job opportunities;
- Addressing the threat ocean acidification poses to the coastal environment and the jobs that depend on shellfish harvesting (a bill I co-sponsored with Rep. Mick Devin);
- Supporting efforts to combat milfoil and other invasive species;
- Ensuring Maine meets federal dam relicensing deadlines so the state retains its say in water levels important to wildlife, sports, property values and the outdoor economy;
- Would have replenished the solar energy rebate program through a bill I co-sponsored with Rep. Terry Morrison and strengthened lake protection efforts and reduced fertilizer application within 25 feet of lakes, but the governor vetoed both these measures.

Serving you & keeping you informed

- Frequent legislative updates via social media and my website;
- Video updates airing on shuttle buses around town;
- Media appearances on TV, radio, and in print to explain key initiatives;
- Bi-weekly column in the local newspaper;
- Participated in Mary's Walk with my non-profit;
- Hosted numerous constituents up at the State House;
- Presented legislative sentiments to a newly honored Saco Eagle Scout and Maine Geography Bee winner from Saco Middle School;
- Helped organize an event to thank our Vietnam veterans for their service to this country; and
- Spoke to student groups, including Saco Middle School Builder's Club, Hugh O'Brian Youth Leadership, Equality Maine's New Leaders Project participants, and Saco Boy Scout Troops.

Dear Neighbor,

I hope you are doing well. We have wrapped up the second regular session of the 126th Legislature. I've included information in this newsletter detailing the highlights of this past session and the bills I pushed for that impact our community.

Growing Maine's economy and strengthening the middle class remained our highest priority, building on the good work started last year.

As Vice Chair of the bipartisan Legislative Youth Caucus, working across the aisle to achieve commonsense reforms is a central theme in my legislative service. The supplemental budget represented a coming together of both sides. This bipartisan cooperation resulted in helping Mainers with disabilities access care, supporting nursing homes for our most vulnerable seniors, and making key investments in education and workforce training.

Together, we worked towards helping small businesses grow, increasing educational opportunities, protecting the environment, and improving access to health care.

Feel free to reach out anytime you have a question, concern, or would just like to chat. Call me, Facebook me, tweet me, text me, e-mail me – whichever mode of communication you use. I'm here to work for you, so your feedback is really important to me.

Thank you for the trust you have in me to represent our great community at the State House.

Sincerely,



Helping to organize an anti-bullying walk.



Touring the Biddeford-Saco Water facility.



Bottling plant tour.



Visiting the Saco Armory.

Connect with me anytime

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Youth Caucus & championing young Mainers

Through pre-kindergarten, college, and workforce training, young Mainers will have greater access to quality education and job opportunities.

Our Legislative Youth Caucus, which is composed of 13 legislators under the age of 30 on both sides of the aisle, has continued to push for education reform after passing several measures into law last year.

The high cost of post-secondary education is an issue for so many young people. A bill to expand the Opportunity Maine program, which I co-sponsored with Rep. Catherine Nadeau, passed but ultimately did not receive funding from the Appropriations Committee. This measure would have meant more students could take advantage of this vital program to help pay down college loans, especially those who leave the state for school because their chosen program doesn't exist at an accredited institution in Maine. We should be incentivizing their return to live, work, and play here in the state and helping make college more affordable.

Other bills passed include:

- Making Maine the first in the nation to support foster children with higher education through age 26 rather than age 20;
- Helping students make higher education decisions by providing information on employment and earnings outcomes of Maine college and university graduates;
- Addressing the challenges to degree completion;
- Increasing access to quality child care by using available

Supporting our brave men and women

Veterans across Maine will benefit from measures that recognize their service and help them transition to civilian life. Bills passed include:

- Ensuring that Iraq and Afghanistan veterans can take advantage of a property tax exemption that veterans of earlier conflicts can already receive (a bill I co-sponsored with Rep. Lori Fowle);
- Allowing private employers to adopt a veterans preference in their hiring practices;
- Granting all veterans in-state tuition rates at Maine's public universities and community colleges;
- Providing financial support for the Veterans Treatment Court and paving the way for its expansion across the state; and
- Urging the federal government to compensate Maine National Guard veterans for Agent Orange exposure from training at the military base at Gagetown, New Brunswick.



Saco Middle School Band visits the State House to perform the National Anthem. When Rep. Chenette attended SMS, he played the trumpet.

- federal funds;
- Supporting voluntary pre-kindergarten programs with start-up funding;
- Feeding hungry students during summer vacation and forming a task force with the goal of finding ways to end child hunger; and
- Investing in the early education program Head Start; the Bridge Year program, which allows high school students to earn college credits; and Jobs for Maine's Graduates, a school-to-career program.



Rep. Chenette joins Craig Pendleton, executive director of the Biddeford-Saco Chamber of Commerce, and Sen. Linda Valentino at the Legislature's annual Chamber Day.

Reasonable welfare reform

During this past session, we put forward reasonable reforms to our public assistance program, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). These proposals would have prohibited the use of TANF funds for tobacco, alcohol, lottery tickets, gambling and bail, as well as prohibiting retailers from accepting TANF funds for these products. This approach would have prevented the misuse of public funds while keeping the TANF program available to the people who need it most. It also would have placed reasonable expectations on businesses and would have ensured a level of personal responsibility on the individual. I believe this was the path to true reform.

These reforms passed in the Senate, but failed to gather enough votes in the House and did not become law.

Tax fairness lifts all Maine People

While property tax decisions are made at the local level, we can do our part at the state level to ensure that property taxes are kept in check. A number of bills we passed this session focused on ensuring our residents and small businesses aren't unnecessarily burdened by a shift in the tax burden to the municipalities. Bills passed include:

- Increasing the new Property Tax Fairness Credit for seniors and middle class families;
- Protecting \$40 million in promised revenue sharing funds that towns and cities like Saco need to support vital services without significant property tax hikes; and
- Would have stopped multinational corporations from evading Maine taxes by using offshore tax havens to hide money and put Maine-based businesses at a competitive disadvantage. The governor, however, vetoed the measure.



Rep. Chenette discusses strategies to make college more affordable on WCSH 6's Morning Report with Jackie Ward.

Increasing access to health care

Bills passed by the Legislature include:

- Helping consumers with health care decisions by making costs more transparent;
- Preventing deaths by allowing first-responders to carry the drug overdose reversal medication naloxone;
- Increasing the chances that a patient needing a bone marrow transplant will find a donor;
- Would have expanded health coverage to approx. 70,000 Mainers, including nearly 2,700 veterans, but the governor vetoed those measures;
- Would have expanded access to preventative care such as cancer screenings and Pap tests as well as birth control for low-income women, but the governor vetoed the measure.

Bipartisan budget reflects our shared values

This year's \$32 million budget was crafted by the Legislature with overwhelming support on both sides of the aisle in the House and Senate. The budget prioritizes spending based on key areas from the youngest preschoolers, individuals with disabilities, future workers, to our senior population. It pays our bills, protects the most vulnerable, and makes investments in our education system.

The budget:

- Promotes work readiness through funding for Jobs for Maine's Graduates school-to-career program;
- Encourages college enrollment with funding for Bridge Year, a program that allows high school students to earn college credits;
- Invests in critical early childhood years by providing funding for Head Start;
- Reduces wait lists for Mainers with disabilities in need of home care services;
- Supports nursing homes that serve the most

vulnerable low-income seniors with a much-needed increase in the reimbursement rates; and

- Promotes public health with funding for disaster assistance and drinking water infrastructure loans.



Rep. Chenette participates in Mary's Walk with the team from Saco Bay Center for Civic Engagement.