

Senate President Beth Edmonds

2005 Legislative Report & Survey



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www.mainesenate.org/edmonds



President Beth Edmonds

Report to Voters

Dear Neighbor,

We began this session of the Legislature with major legislation to deliver property tax relief, sending \$250 million in new aid to help towns and municipalities fund local education. I co-sponsored this bill, which had significant bipartisan support. Almost every community in Maine is seeing an increase in state support for their school systems. In many cases local property taxes have decreased.

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing every new legislature is the passage of the budget for the coming two years. This year was especially difficult because Maine's fiscal resources continue to be stretched. I am proud of our answer to these challenges. We provided significant new resources to K-12 schools and the circuit breaker property tax relief program while trimming state spending in most other areas. As a result, Maine's long-term budget picture is significantly improved.

We kept more promises to our constituents. We enacted legislation to sustain Dirigo Health, which is working to provide affordable health care to small businesses and individuals. We passed groundbreaking civil rights legislation that will finally prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation. This bill goes to voters for approval in November.

To further expand Maine's successful biomedical sciences industry, we created the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences at the University of Maine. We also approved bonds that will invest in the biosciences.

These are a few examples of the work we did. Countless more bills like those above enhanced the lives of Maine people. Some of these are highlighted in this newsletter.

Sincerely,

A blue ink handwritten signature that reads "Beth".

Beth Edmonds
Senate President

Delivering Property Tax Relief

Property tax relief will be provided through an expansion of the circuit breaker program, increasing eligibility to individuals with incomes up to \$75,000 or families with incomes up to \$100,000. For those eligible, the maximum benefit will double from \$1,000 to \$2,000. Applications for this program were made available in August. Furthermore, the homestead exemption has been expanded to give most households a \$13,000 exemption. For more information regarding these programs contact Maine Revenue Services at 207-626-8475 or go to www.mainesenate.org/taxreform.



Promoting Economic Development

I'm happy to say that the \$83 million bond package passed at the end of July and will be on your referendum ballot November 1. The Legislature joined together in a nearly unanimous vote for several key reasons. One: the package will earn nearly \$225 million in additional matching or leveraged funds from outside sources, making the total benefit to Maine over \$300 million. Two: We viewed this as fiscally responsible in a time of need after not having passed bonds for two years. Three: Much of this package is about more jobs and education for Maine people. This will be the necessary stimulus to give Maine a financial boost in otherwise uncertain times. I'm proud to have been a leader of this process.



Improving the Workplace

Many workers will find it easier to balance work and family responsibilities thanks to two bills enacted this year. I sponsored "An Act to Care for Families" which requires employers to let workers use their paid sick leave or other available paid leave to care for a sick child, spouse or parent. Many employers already allow this, but the new law makes sure that all employers who have 25 or more employees grant this right to workers. Another bill now extends the law allowing workers to collect unemployment benefits even if they are only seeking a part-time new job because of family responsibilities or other reasons.

Supporting Increased School Funding

Last year the people of Maine spoke powerfully when they approved an initiative calling for the state to dramatically increase its share of K-12 education costs. This year the Legislature responded, approving an increase of over \$250 million and bringing the state's share to 50% (\$874 million) in 2007. To fully meet our obligations under the initiative, we committed to a further increase of \$250 million during the coming biennium. This is the largest raise in 25 years. Thanks to these efforts, every Maine school district will see a rise in state support for the coming (2005-2006) school year. Those school districts serving communities in Senate District 10 will receive an increase of over \$10 million.

Redeveloping Brunswick Naval Air Station

The entire Mid-Coast region was rocked in August when the Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC) recommended that Brunswick Naval Air Station be closed. Our first concern is for those workers who will lose their jobs, and for their families. The departure of the many service members stationed at BNAS will also be a major blow to our communities. A variety of measures are already underway to assist displaced workers, including over \$1 million in assistance from the US Department of Labor. Local communities and the state have already initiated cooperative efforts to manage the transition. One silver lining is that the major impact of closure is deferred, with large-scale layoffs and troop transfers not commencing until 2008.





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Legislative Survey

*Please mail completed survey to:
3 State House Station, Augusta, ME 04333*

1. Senator Edmonds would like to know how you feel about the issues facing your community.

Please rate below in order of priority from 1 to 6, the issues that most concern you. If there are other issues not listed here, please write them in the allocated space.

- healthcare
- education
- economic development
- taxes
- roads
- protecting our environment
- other issues: _____

2. If the legislature can put more resources into one area, it should be:

- Dirigo Health
- Roads & Bridges
- K-12 Education
- Higher Education
- Research & Development

Agree Disagree

3. Expanding Dirigo Health should be a priority next year.

4. Maine should use bonds to further stimulate our economy.

5. The cost of going to college in Maine is too high.

6. Decisions about local taxing and spending should be made at the local level.

7. Maine should respond to base closures by making major investments in economic development and job retraining.