

The Presiding Officers' Advisory Task Force on Creating a Future for Youth in Maine

2nd Meeting, October 2, 2003 Meeting Notes

Task Force Members in attendance: Honorable Elizabeth Mitchell (co-chair), Speaker Patrick Colwell (co-chair), Sen. Christopher Hall, Sen. Stephen Stanley, Rep. Jeremy Fischer, Rep. Jonathan Thomas, Megan Gean, Jeremy Pare, Joe Perry, Linda Petrie, Patrice Putman.

1. Convening of the Meeting and Introductions

- Co-chairs Speaker Patrick Colwell and Elizabeth Mitchell opened the meeting.
- Speaker Colwell welcomed everyone and thanked USM for hosting the meeting.
- Elizabeth Mitchell noted that the charge to this task force is to come up with some value-added strategies to recommend to the Legislature; she reviewed the three decision points that the task force is considering as potential points of intervention: (1) if and where to go to college, (2) where to take first job out of college, (3) where to settle and raise a family
- Task force members introduced themselves (for additional information on task force members, see section 1 of 9/5/03 meeting notes)

2. Welcoming Remarks – University of Southern Maine

Richard Pattenaude, President, University of Southern Maine

President Pattenaude opened his remarks with the comment that “if the issue is jobs then the answer is education.” He pointed to the need to strengthen the education system across the whole continuum from adult education through graduate education. He highlighted three points:

- He is pleased with emergence of community college system and noted the importance of financial aid at the point of transfer from community college to university.
- He noted emerging issues in Southern Maine relating to the refugee and immigrant communities of Portland and Lewiston. He indicated that many refugees are highly trained and educated and suggested the importance of programs to help refugees get into high-end ESL classes and into university programs and the workforce.
- He cited the importance of a continued commitment to research and development. He noted R&D is very important to building a solid economic base and not to lose track of R&D to work as partners with industry to develop jobs for Maine.

Karl Braithwaite, Dean, Muskie School of Public Service

He noted that the Muskie School staffs the Legislative Youth Advisory Council and summarized four key points about what research has shown young adults are looking for in making choices about where to live:

- Jobs – a rich bed of employment opportunities so that they have options if their first job does not work out
- Housing – ability to enter the housing market
- Cultural/recreational activities
- Education – opportunities to get more education if they need master's/doctorate for their career development

3. Public Testimony – What Can We Do to Retain and Attract Youth?

- Require educational institutions that receive state funding to adopt criteria and provide materials (developed by the State) to inform students about higher education and employment opportunities in Maine
- Require high schools to provide counseling on career development to every student and to start this early in high school; create checklists for students that set deadlines and help students throughout high school to prepare for the next step; provide direct mailings to students and parents
- Specific efforts to educate high school students about the opportunities and benefits of attending the University of Maine System
- Develop a website geared towards high school students regarding college opportunities and skills needed for different careers
- Advertise existing resources relating to education and employment opportunities – resources exist but people are not aware of them; two examples: Maine Info Net and Maine Career Centers
- Establish partnerships between Maine businesses and educational institutions to launch internship programs and scholarship programs
- Provide a tax incentive to businesses that hire students directly from Maine colleges
- Create policies to address housing costs
- Increase graduate degree programs in Maine to meet the demands of the economy
- Add/expand student loan forgiveness programs to help students stay in Maine
- Work with the Chambers of Commerce (Dana Connors and local chambers) to help them understand the importance of the issue; remember that people who make the jobs available are the employers; believes the employers will want to help
- Guidance counselors are an untapped resources
- To grow technology in Maine:
 - Realize growth will come from South to North
 - USM needs to become equal to University of Maine – so there is a strong university to anchor Southern Maine
 - Lower taxes to foster business
 - Improve infrastructure in Southern Maine
- Support “excellence” – Jackson Laboratory is a prime example, it attracts the best talent due to its excellence, even though location is remote
- Market/promote programs that support business and economic development; there could be a role within government to promote the available programs and resources
- Greater support for the Maine Technology Institute, the Center for Environmental Enterprise, and the Environmental and Energy Technology Council of Maine
- Statewide plan for smart growth development and provide Maine State Housing Authority funding to provide incentives to developers
- Additional funding to increase base budgets of two-year and four-year colleges and universities in Maine
- Increased funding for research and development at Maine universities
- Cooperative education and internships to connect students to the workplace; encourage businesses to develop internship opportunities
- Need to publicize resources that are available

- Create a state or nonprofit office designed to serve as a focal point for young people and puts retaining and attracting young people on the front burner (model after PUMP program in Pittsburgh); this office would:
 - Survey young adults on issues of importance to them
 - Work with human resource professionals and college career planning centers
 - Collaborate with State Planning Office, Department of Economic and Community Development, Maine Development Foundation
 - Issue newsletters
 - Provide focal point and central resource for business, government, education and young adults
 - Provide statewide events that engage young adults in activities that encourage them to stay in Maine
 - Work with private industry on initiatives to retain youth and promote the hiring of Maine graduates/workers
 - Award young Mainers for public service and success in industry
- Organize a conference on Maine's future held by Maine's young people
- Market Maine as attractive place to live and work
- Focus on niche technologies/businesses that have a foothold in Maine and promote their growth
- Target student loan forgiveness to low-income students
- Take advantage of recreational opportunities in Maine as a way to promote the state
- Provide financial incentives for people to move to Maine (moving allowance)
- Make high speed internet access readily available to young people (subsidize)
- Market Maine's quality of life
- Create "one-stop shopping" for businesses wanting to relocate to Maine; single point of contact for people to direct them to resources (see <http://www.maine.gov/businessanswers/>)
- Create and grow small business clusters
- Create a single agency or group to be responsible for efforts to retain and attract youth could be very effective
- There are lots of opportunities that people do not know about; there is a place for some marketing; one target audience would be people who have moved out of state
- Create strategies to stay in touch with young people who leave Maine for college and keep them connected/informed: website, "come home" campaign, information on Maine jobs
- Increase marketing of Maine opportunities
- Create graduate degree programs to support the needs of local businesses
- Improve marketing of colleges and universities in Maine; devote more resources to promoting Maine schools
- Improve the quality and reputation of University of Maine System, make it more competitive; improve libraries and labs
- Improve transportation, particularly Portland northward
- Create youth centers in communities
- Work with high schools to provide students with information about what Maine has to offer in terms of higher education and employment
- Field trips between urban and rural parts of the state
- Provide statewide public transportation; improve urban public transportation
- Promote arts and music; create "scene" so people don't have to go to Boston/NYC
- Create an organization to analyze labor market and promote businesses to match resources
- Provide more scholarships for students to attend UMS

- Create better connections and ties between universities with the community/local businesses
- Create incentives for more innovating and affordable housing, especially in Portland
- Promote “smart growth” in smaller communities; grow walking town centers
- Create statewide system of trails for wildlife and young people for outdoor activity
- Create foreign exchange program for Maine students
- Reduce cost of airfares within state and out of state
- Consider the speed of business conversion to electronic technology and how job skills are changing
- Develop a college level learning disabilities program in-state so students do not have to go out of state for college
- Create more social/nightlife options for people 18-20
- Improve transportation options
- Improve image and reputation of USM
- Sell the strengths of Maine: quality of life, access to people; “small pond”
- Give attention to the needs of Northern Maine

4. Discussion Among Task Force Members

Speaker Colwell

- Views the lack of central clearinghouse and lack of coordinated effort to connect graduates with jobs as serious issues that need attention; suggested we “need some way to connect the dots”
- Noted that testimony reinforced the strong need for strategies to connect business and education, such as internship programs; noted that some internship programs exist but it appears that there is a lack of structure and coordination at this point; wants to explore how to promote the internship concept with the business community

Elizabeth Mitchell

- Summarized what she heard young people want: nightlife, affordable housing, jobs, good schools for their kids, culture
- Believes we need to get serious about where doctoral programs are needed; need to find out what industry and businesses need and provide the necessary graduate programs within the University of Maine System (noted importance of thinking of it as a unified system)
- Troubled by the lack of communication and lack of information about resources that are available that could help retain and attract youth; there is a real need to get the word out about what is already being done; noted that there is so much already going on and “if we could figure out how to put it together and coordinate it all we might not need to spend another dime”

Representative Thomas

Noted the following themes in the testimony:

- Transportation – Noted that he had not given this a lot of thought before but thinks it is deserves some attention given the testimony
- Higher Education – Concept that the “best attracts the best”; noted that Maine currently pays graduate students some of the lowest stipends in the nation
- Loan Forgiveness / Loan Repayment Programs – Sees potential for these to bring people back to Maine

Patrice Putman

Noted two ideas of interest:

- There are young people who have done their adventuring and are ready to come back to Maine; we need to find a way to keep them connected and allow them to come back; would like to have some strategies to target that group (ages 28-35)
- The importance of quality of life to many speakers in their choice to come/stay/return to Maine – need to assure we preserve quality of life in Maine; also noted related issues of sprawl, smart growth, community spirit

Jeremy Pare

- Noted the importance of community; believes the state could do a better job of promoting community; mentioned a co-housing community in Brunswick that preserves open space
- Suggested creating and marketing “Maine Connects” tax break for companies that employ Maine graduates and/or hire interns; noted the importance of education, government and private sector connecting through internships
- Asked whether it would be difficult to expand Ph.D. programs at USM

Linda Petrie

- Noted that there are student loan programs, business and economic development programs, and job search resources that already exist but people are not aware of them; believes there needs to be an effort to coordinate and promote existing resources
- Suggested that we need some really good public relations and marketing for Maine in order to do a better job of selling the state to young people
- Suggested that high school students and their parents should get more information about what is available for college and financial aid; high schools need to send this information home and this needs to be done at the beginning of high school; mentioned that the Poland High School is requiring every student to apply to college with the idea that going through that process may open the idea of college to them
- Noted that local community leadership can make a big difference; provided example of the town manager in Mexico and his determination: brought in Walmart and that started a domino effect; also secured \$400,000 grant for technology center

Senator Stanley

- Echo Linda Petrie’s comments
- Noted that alumni want to return to Maine and if we have the tools in place and provide incentives, we can get them back
- Stated that he is a firm believer in affordable housing
- Noted that in his district, they have worked hard to bring educational programs to the people
- Suggested that we really need to focus on bringing information and existing resources together and letting people know what we do have
- Believes the best thing we can do is attract the people who know about Maine who want to come back

Joe Perry

- Noted the comment that was made during public testimony that the University of Maine System is not desirable and wondered whether that was in fact the case; asked what could be done to improve the desirability of UMS

John Simko (via email)

- Suggests a student loan forgiveness program to encourage college graduates to stay in Maine; program would provide loan forgiveness for a student that graduated from a Maine college or university and takes a job in Maine in an “strategic field” that the state has identified for the program; could accelerate/expand loan forgiveness for students who live and work in underserved rural areas; consider setting academic achievement requirements; integrate Pine Tree Development Zones and Advanced Technology Development Centers to the program
- Suggests a guaranteed mortgage program for college graduates who choose to settle in rural Maine; would have academic achievement requirements and residency requirements; again could build in Pine Tree Development Zones and Advanced Technology Development Centers
- For both of the above ideas, create a program that the student would enter during college and be required to meet certain goals and benchmarks throughout college and afterward to receive the benefits