

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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Legislative Record
House of Representatives
One Hundred and Twenty-First Legislature
State of Maine

Volume III

Second Special Session

April 8, 2004 - April 30, 2004

Appendix
House Legislative Sentiments
Index

Pages 1563-2203

The following item was taken up out of order by unanimous consent:

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

The following matter, in the consideration of which the House was engaged at the time of adjournment yesterday, had preference in the Orders of the Day and continued with such preference until disposed of as provided by House Rule 502.

HOUSE DIVIDED REPORT - Majority (8) **Ought to Pass as Amended by Committee Amendment "A" (H-820)** - Minority (4) **Ought Not to Pass** - Committee on **LABOR** on Bill "An Act To Improve Standards for Public Assistance to Employers in the State"

(H.P. 424) (L.D. 561)

TABLED - April 1, 2004 (Till Later Today) by Representative WATSON of Bath.

PENDING - Motion of same Representative to **ACCEPT** the Majority **OUGHT TO PASS AS AMENDED** Report.

On motion of Representative RICHARDSON of Brunswick, **TABLED UNASSIGNED** pending the motion of Representative WATSON of Bath to **ACCEPT** the Majority **Ought to Pass as Amended** Report.

The SPEAKER: The Chair recognizes the Representative from Damariscotta, Representative Earle who wishes to address the House on the record.

Representative **EARLE**: Mr. Speaker, Ladies and Gentlemen of the House. Had I been here on LD 1820, Roll Call 456, I would have voted no. Roll Call 457, vote yes. Roll Call 458, vote yes. Roll Call 459, vote yes. Roll Call 460, yes. Roll Call 461, yes. Roll Call 462, yes. Roll call 463, yes. Roll Call 464, yes. Roll Call 465, yes. Roll Call 466, yes. Roll Call 467, yes. Roll Call 468, yes. Roll Call 469, yes. Roll Call 470, yes. Roll Call 471, yes. Roll Call 472, no. Roll Call 473, yes. Roll Call 474, yes. Roll Call 475, yes. Roll Call 476, yes. Thank you for your indulgence.

The House recessed until the Sound of the Bell.

(After Recess)

The House was called to order by the Speaker.

The following item was taken up out of order by unanimous consent:

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

The following matter, in the consideration of which the House was engaged at the time of adjournment yesterday, had preference in the Orders of the Day and continued with such preference until disposed of as provided by House Rule 502.

HOUSE DIVIDED REPORT - Majority (12) **Ought to Pass as Amended by Committee Amendment "A" (H-888)** - Minority (3) **Ought Not to Pass** - Joint Select Committee on **REGIONALIZATION AND COMMUNITY COOPERATION** on Bill "An Act To Encourage Voluntary Efficiency in Maine's School Systems and Related Costs Savings"

(H.P. 1422) (L.D. 1921)

TABLED - April 13, 2004 (Till Later Today) by Representative McLAUGHLIN of Cape Elizabeth.

PENDING - Motion of same Representative to **ACCEPT** the Majority **OUGHT TO PASS AS AMENDED** Report.

Representative CLARK of Millinocket **REQUESTED** a roll call on the motion to **ACCEPT** the Majority **Ought to Pass as Amended** Report.

More than one-fifth of the members present expressed a desire for a roll call which was ordered.

The SPEAKER: The Chair recognizes the Representative from North Haven, Representative Pingree.

Representative **PINGREE**: Mr. Speaker, Men and Women of the House. I certainly don't want to belabor this evening and I don't want to belabor it with this issue. I just feel the need to make a statement on the record about this bill. I guess I want to start by saying the original purpose of this bill, I was very much against. I believe the way the department and the administration and some people involved put out reports looking for findings and were very specific and note exactly completely on point. I just think it needs to be said that there are many schools in the State of Maine are small that do a very good job. I think that the committee had a very difficult task in front of them and they worked for a long time and they worked very hard and they ended up with a good result. Originally I had intended to be completely against this overall concept because I viewed it as the consolidation bill. I believe there were reports that came out that Maine small schools are not as good at educating kids and therefore if they are combined with other schools they would be better. I believe this was a false assumption and that the committee recognized that. I think both the House and Senate chair did an excellent job listening to the small schools in the State of Maine.

While I am still uncomfortable with what the original premise of this bill was, I think that it was mostly changed and altered to make it a far more voluntary, incentive driven bill based on creating efficiencies, but not necessarily determining that consolidation is the best way to go.

I just want to say at this moment that there is a trend in our state and it is what people in education are talking about. It is that larger school districts, larger high schools are better. I just wanted, on the record, to say that many small schools in the State of Maine do an excellent job. Small schools in the State of Maine do a better job or an equal job at educating low-income kids. There have been some arguments made in the newspaper that small schools actually don't do as good a job as larger schools. When you look at the school lunch program, the number of kids who need a subsidy for school lunch, small schools do a better job of educating poor kids.

I think over the next few years we, as a Legislature, are going to have to be incredibly vigilant on this issue, as Rob Page, the Secretary of Education, and as people across the country recognize that small schools, small classes are the best way to educate kids. I just don't want us in the State of Maine to believe and to move towards large consolidated high schools, elementary schools. I just wanted to say this on the record because this issue worries me. I am not specifically worried very much for my district. I live on an island. I graduated in a class of five people. It is hard to consolidate island schools because we have long ferry rides. For the Lubecs of Maine, for the Richmonds of Maine and for the small schools that are doing a good job, I am worried. I think we, as a Legislature, need to pay attention to this. This is a step in the right direction. I think this bill very much could have been a step in the wrong direction.

I hope the Legislature, especially people from rural areas, will help me in this task over the coming years. Thank you.