

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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sort of the pest of the Education Committee. I was on Judiciary, but I think I spent as much time down in Education as I possibly could. I was at that point in time still representing students statewide through the University of Maine at Augusta. I had about 6,000 constituents that I was very concerned about in not only the quality, but also the quantity of the education they were getting out of the University of Maine at Augusta. With Mike Higgins help, and I wasn't a member of his committee at all, he was able to get me through as a freshman all of those kinds of procedural hurdles that I needed to do to become an effective legislator, not on that committee, but to actually help to facilitate making some changes in making our university system better than it was and certainly to strengthen what I felt was one of the weakest chains of the seven campuses. I will be eternally grateful to Michael for having helped me as a student and also all of those other students that I represented. I don't know if I ever really thanked him properly for all that he did that first term that I was here. Michael, thank you, best wishes and good luck in whatever you are going to do next. Thank you.

Subsequently, the Sentiment was **PASSED** and sent for concurrence.

The following items were taken up out of order by unanimous consent:

ENACTORS

Emergency Measure

An Act to Revise Certain Provisions of the Fish and Wildlife Laws

(S.P. 738) (L.D. 2088)

(S. "A" S-322 to C. "A" S-292; S. "A" S-358; S. "B" S-368)

Reported by the Committee on **Engrossed Bills** as truly and strictly engrossed. This being an emergency measure, a two-thirds vote of all the members elected to the House being necessary, a total was taken. 127 voted in favor of the same and 2 against, and accordingly the Bill was **PASSED TO BE ENACTED**, signed by the Speaker and sent to the Senate.

Emergency Measure

An Act to Retain Jobs at Paper Production Facilities in the State

(S.P. 816) (L.D. 2222)

(C. "A" S-373)

Reported by the Committee on **Engrossed Bills** as truly and strictly engrossed. This being an emergency measure, a two-thirds vote of all the members elected to the House being necessary, a total was taken. 117 voted in favor of the same and 7 against, and accordingly the Bill was **PASSED TO BE ENACTED**, signed by the Speaker and sent to the Senate.

Emergency Measure - Confirmation Process

An Act to Provide for the 1999 and 2000 Allocations of the State Ceiling on Private Activity Bonds

(S.P. 417) (L.D. 1206)

(S. "A" S-362 to C. "A" S-341)

Reported by the Committee on **Engrossed Bills** as truly and strictly engrossed. This being an emergency measure, a two-thirds vote of all the members elected to the House being necessary, a total was taken. 129 voted in favor of the same

and 0 against, and accordingly the Bill was **PASSED TO BE ENACTED**, signed by the Speaker and sent to the Senate.

Acts

An Act to Amend the Harness Racing Laws

(H.P. 1276) (L.D. 1837)

(S. "A" S-367 to C. "A" H-703)

An Act to Expand Membership on the Maine Tourism Commission

(S.P. 824) (L.D. 2227)

(C. "A" S-371)

Reported by the Committee on **Engrossed Bills** as truly and strictly engrossed, **PASSED TO BE ENACTED**, signed by the Speaker and sent to the Senate.

An Act to Provide Assistance to Low-income Energy Consumers

(H.P. 1069) (L.D. 1500)

(H. "A" H-692)

Was reported by the Committee on **Engrossed Bills** as truly and strictly engrossed.

On motion of Representative WATERHOUSE of Bridgton, was **SET ASIDE**.

The SPEAKER: The Chair recognizes the Representative from Bridgton, Representative Waterhouse.

Representative **WATERHOUSE**: Mr. Speaker, Ladies and Gentlemen of the House. If you look at this amendment, I will read a section of it. It says, "Under this amendment that portion of the corporate income tax collected from the electric utilities by the State Tax Assessor attributable to the gain on the sale or transfer of generation assets divested after May 21, 1999 must be paid by the State Tax Assessor to the Maine State Housing Authority, which must deposit them in the Maine Low-Income Energy Assistance Fund." May I pose a question? Could somebody please correct me if I am wrong or at least inform me and the rest of the members of the House, was there some money from this type of activity? I heard the sum of \$60 million or something like that that had been available, but got folded into the Part I Budget or something. Could somebody please clarify that for me please?

The SPEAKER: The Representative from Bridgton, Representative Waterhouse has posed a question through the Chair to anyone who may care to respond. The Chair recognizes the Representative from Wilton, Representative LaVerdiere.

Representative **LAVERDIERE**: Mr. Speaker, Men and Women of the House. In answer to the good Representative's question, the sale of the Central Maine Power Company assets produced approximately \$57 million. That money has, in fact, been used as part of the Part II Budget. This particular bill is one which would deal with the proceeds of the sale. The tax on the proceeds of the sale from both the Bangor Hydro and the Maine Public Service sales, which are in the process of being completed at the moment.

The SPEAKER: The Chair recognizes the Representative from Bridgton, Representative Waterhouse.

Representative **WATERHOUSE**: Mr. Speaker, May I pose a question through the Chair?

The SPEAKER: The Representative may pose his question.

Representative **WATERHOUSE**: Mr. Speaker, Men and Women of the House. I hate to belabor this point, could somebody please explain to me the rationale for not using the \$57 million to put into this Low-income Energy Assistance Fund at the time it was available?

The **SPEAKER**: The Representative from Bridgton, Representative Waterhouse has posed a question through the Chair to anyone who may care to respond. The Chair recognizes the Representative from Portland, Representative Saxl.

Representative **SAXL**: Mr. Speaker, Men and Women of the House. In answer to the good Representative from Bridgton's question, as the sponsor of LD 1500, I can't tell you why we didn't put the money from the one-time opportunity to put generating asset sales tax money to this trust fund. It would have been a great program. It would have taken and dealt with the low-income community and made sure their needs were met while lowering a tax on the rest of Maine taxpayers. Because of other priorities, whether it was lowering the sales tax for some or increasing aide to education for others or other priorities in the budget, both priorities won out over this one-time expenditure. However, there is a remaining opportunity through this amendment brought together through a unanimous approval of the committee of jurisdiction to put prospective funds from future sales of generating assets into a trust fund to begin weatherizing and other ways to lower costs so that this will ultimately, hopefully lower the cost of this program on ratepayers while meeting the existing needs of individual energy consumers.

The **SPEAKER**: The Chair recognizes the Representative from Bridgton, Representative Waterhouse.

Representative **WATERHOUSE**: Mr. Speaker, May I pose a question through the Chair?

The **SPEAKER**: The Representative may pose his question.

Representative **WATERHOUSE**: Mr. Speaker, Men and Women of the House. I do think this is a good idea. Could you clarify for me, in the past, this low-income assistance was that through a tax that was on the citizen's energy bill. This new proposal will relieve that burden from the rest of the citizens so that it is paid directly from this fund?

The **SPEAKER**: The Representative from Bridgton, Representative Waterhouse has posed a question through the Chair to anyone who may care to respond. The Chair recognizes the Representative from Wilton, Representative LaVerdiere.

Representative **LAVERDIERE**: Mr. Speaker, Men and Women of the House. In answer to your question, right now when you pay your electric bill a very small portion of each kilowatt-hour goes into a fund, which is used to pay for assistance to those low-income people who cannot pay their electric bills. The original intent of LD 1500 was to be able to take all of the proceeds that came to the state in the form of taxes from the sale of those assets into a trust fund, which would then allow a reduction if not an elimination of the fee that is tacked onto your electric bill every month. Because the money is not sufficient to sustain that long term, what we are hoping is to take what money we can receive from future sales and put it into this fund and thereby hopefully reduce the charge that is tacked onto your electric bill every month. It is not as much as we had hoped for, but it certainly will help.

The **SPEAKER**: The Chair recognizes the Representative from Fryeburg, Representative True.

Representative **TRUE**: Mr. Speaker, Men and Women of the House. I think Representative Waterhouse has certainly asked some good questions, but I think and please correct me if I am wrong, I think that the intention was not only to set it aside for a while so that it would gain a lot of interest and so forth, but it would have taken care of the low-income consumers, but also every single person that had a bill from the electrical people and then a portion of that would have been paid also. I think that we should remember this when we get a chance to tuck a little bit away if I may say.

Subsequently, the Bill was **PASSED TO BE ENACTED**, signed by the Speaker and sent to the Senate.

By unanimous consent, all matters having been acted upon were **ORDERED SENT FORTHWITH**.

The Chair laid before the House the following item which was **TABLED** earlier in today's session:

HOUSE DIVIDED REPORT - Majority (8) Ought to Pass as Amended by Committee Amendment "A" (H-728) - Minority (5) Ought to Pass as Amended by Committee Amendment "B" (H-729) - Committee on TRANSPORTATION on Bill "An Act to Make Supplemental Allocations from the Highway Fund for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2000 and June 30, 2001" (EMERGENCY)

(H.P. 690) (L.D. 957)

Which was **TABLED** by Representative JABAR of Waterville pending his motion to **ACCEPT** the Minority **Ought to Pass as Amended Report**.

The **SPEAKER**: The Chair recognizes the Representative from Waterville, Representative Jabar.

Representative **JABAR**: Mr. Speaker, Ladies and Gentlemen of the House. We have been waiting for this day for a long time to talk about the gas tax. A colleague of mine said to just get up and tell everybody to dial 311 for safe road and good bridges. I wish it were that simple. It really isn't that simple. It is never easy to get up and talk in favor of a tax, but that seems to be the fear that everybody has in this chamber. As I talk to people and ask them how they feel about the gas tax there is this certain cringing that they have because we are talking about increasing taxes. Nobody has any problem decreasing taxes and we have been doing that and doing it at a pretty good rate these last few years. I look at what we have done this session and the last session and it adds up to a considerable amount of money. We talk about the sales tax and now after this budget goes through it will have gone down 1 cent, which is about \$120 million a year. We talk about the homestead exemption at about \$47 million a year. The income tax reduction, \$36 million a year. The renter's relief on the circuit breaker, \$4 million a year. The BETR Program, \$30 million a year. Without even adding in hospital tax cuts, nursing home tax cuts that have happened recently, we are talking about \$237 million a year or over \$475 million per biennium in the form of tax relief in one form or another. I think we should be complimented for that because I think it is an outstanding job. It is because we have collected so much due to the economy.

Along with that also goes some responsibility in those areas that we need to consider and address and that is our infrastructure and our roads. I don't know what the fear is that we have when we look at the people who are supporting the