Questions for State Representative Candidates

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1) What do you think are the 3 biggest issues Maine faces over the next four years?

The biggest two issues Maine will continue to face over the next four years are jobs and the economy. Maine's economic growth depends on the creation of reliable jobs with good, affordable benefits for all workers --- including health care. We are still being hit hard by the recession and I know many Mainers are still out of work and struggling to make ends meet. I will work to support job creation, small businesses, green jobs and the creative economy.

The third issue is Education. Maine's youth deserve quality early education and increased access to higher education. This supports a strong workforce for our state. In addition to learning skills, I believe we must prioritize prevention education. Our state's funding for crisis response services for a variety of issues cost us millions. We have a great opportunity to educate students on how to make healthy choices that will allow them to succeed in the future.

2) How will you represent *all Portlanders,* including the traditionally marginalized members of our community (for example, the homeless, the poor, those with mental or physical disabilities)?

As an advocate for victims of domestic violence and their children, I have learned that the first step to helping someone is to listen to them. By taking the time to actively listen to each person I meet as I go door to door in Portland, I am learning about some of the challenges Portlanders face on a daily basis. This simple act, when translated into action makes me a better neighbor. I can follow up with people I meet and point them in the direction of resources, offer my sincere concern and consider how I might be able to help as an elected official. In District 119, we have a variety of non-profit organizations that specifically help the traditionally marginalized members of our community – like Preble Street, PROP, 22 Park Avenue and more. In my job, I have worked with these organizations and many others – as a Representative, I will continue to do just that.

One specific barrier I know exists for me personally is language. In District 119, King Middle School and Portland High School combined have students who speak more than 65 different languages! As a Representative, I would like to work with specific communities to organize meetings where translation services are available, to reduce this barrier to effective communication. It is important for me to hear from and represent every constituent in District 119.

3) Pick two of Maine's greatest natural resources and describe your vision for how those resources can utilized in fostering economic stability/growth and at the same time judiciously conserved for future generations.

Part of what I love about living in Portland is the ability to live in a city and still have easy access to our beautiful state. I love taking advantage of the beaches, state and national parks and pedestrian trails. Protecting our environment and keeping Maine beautiful is important to me.

Air

Clean air and clean energy go hand in hand. It is essential for Maine to continue to harness wind energy and lead the way in choosing clean, renewable energy over all. The use of our fossil fuel is harming our environment and people. Improved air quality reduces health problems for the people of Maine. Wind power is completely renewable, produces zero emissions and is fiscally responsible. Wind power creates jobs, too, which is what makes it a win-win situation for the environment and citizens of Maine.

Water

Clean water is essential to our state – for safe drinking water, safe habitat for fish and wildlife and recreation that draws tourism to our state, benefiting our local economy. Because we are surrounded by beautiful landscapes in Portland, it is easy to take for granted this natural resource. We must keep our waterways and bays clean from sewage and pollution. In Portland, I am keenly aware of the work being done to protect and improve Casco Bay. As a legislator, I would support efforts to improve our work around clean water.

4) How will you deal with the budget shortfall? Augusta has been committed to only dealing with one side of the budget, by cutting expenses. Are you open to raising revenues? If so, in what ways?

I am committed to prevention. The cost of social services that provide crisis response to Mainers in need cost our state millions. We must look at the big picture and take every opportunity to support prevention education and early intervention as well as temporary solutions that meet Mainer's needing immediate assistance. Supporting prevention efforts is fiscally responsible, its an investment in long term solutions that will be of greater benefit to our state. I came to Maine to work as a prevention educator around issues of dating violence. This work taught me firsthand that evidence based prevention programs do have an impact. I think we owe it to our young people to support them in making positive choices for a healthy future. It will save us in the long run.

The current administration has not been open to raising revenues, but many of our elected officials indicated they would have examined this as a potential solution this past session. We cannot simply keep cutting our way out of every budget shortfall – it's more costly in the long term and often eliminates jobs. We cannot afford to have more Mainers out of work. A healthy balance between cutting unnecessary spending and identifying fair and responsible ways of raising revenues is the best way to deal with the budget shortfall as we move forward.

5) There has been persistent uncertainty regarding federal subsidies for Rail in Maine (specifically the Downeaster). Are you committed to Maine's Amtrak link? How would the state make up any short fall in federal funding for Amtrak?

I am committed to supporting and expanding Maine's rail system. I think that in this economy, it is important to have competing modes of transportation available. Additionally, the environmental impact of commuting by car could be reduced by having more rail transportation available – not to mention reducing the ever increasing costs to repair roads due to freight and passenger traffic. Finally, supporting and expanding Maine's rail system is about job creation and sustainability.

The Maine Department of Transportation hopes to release an in depth plan in May that looks at the best way to make rail investments and potential sources for federal rail funding. I am hoping MaineDOT can provide guidance about why and how to provide state funding for rail service.

6) Do you support same-sex marriage? (please answer yes or no) If yes, what will you do to further the cause? If no, why do you oppose same-sex marriage?

Yes.

I was actively involved in the legislative campaign to pass the marriage equality bill last session and the referendum campaign that followed. It is important for me to note that I would have personally benefited from the law if it had been upheld. I know there are many issues of equality, economic justice and security at stake for Maine couples who do not have the freedom to marry and legally define themselves and their children as a family. I would vote yes on a marriage equality bill and encourage others to do the same.

7) What policies do you believe need to be enacted to support Maine's growing immigrant and refugee population?

For me, the growing diversity in my community is one of the reasons I love living in Portland, specifically in the Parkside neighborhood. Maine has federal support to welcome refugee populations to our state, and I think we are doing a good job providing services that allow New Mainers to acclimate themselves and their children to the communities we share. However, I know there is always room for improvement. I think it is important to look for ways to continue to support existing programs and non-profit organizations that provide services for immigrant and refugee populations and continue to welcome and support our new neighbors.

From a policy perspective, the Maine Immigrant Rights Coalition has worked to change policies at various state and local agencies. From my career in the Domestic Violence movement, I know that change around policy and systems advocacy is on-going. I want to continue to support existing work and look for new ways to expand work around this important issue.

Recently, in Portland, there is much discussion around Permanent Resident Voting Rights. I am eager to see this question on the ballot in Portland and to hear from voters. This debate has exposed many barriers that exist for those in our community who want to become U.S. citizens. I will look for ways to reduce those barriers in order to encourage full citizenship and participation in democracy.

8) How would you improve labor conditions in Maine?

There are three issues that stand out to me as growing problems in Maine: Human trafficking, labor conditions for migrant farm workers and the ability to stay home if you or a family member become sick.

Human trafficking – The New England Coalition Against Trafficking is a group I have become recently involved with as a result of my work. This group is making a coordinated effort to train service provides on how to recognize and work with victims of trafficking. They are also compiling resources for necessary services. I have learned that many people are being exploited in Maine, though this organization is just beginning to try to identify exact statistics. In my opinion, even one victim of trafficking in Maine is one too many. I am committed to supporting efforts to identify and assist those who have been victimized.

Labor conditions for migrant farm workers – Migrant and seasonal farm workers and their families are considered to be a vulnerable population. These hardworking individuals are often making low wages and engaging in physical labor. As a legislator, it will be important for me to support the work of the Maine Migrant Health Program and others who are providing culturally specific resources and raising awareness throughout the state to support these workers.

Paid sick days and safe days – This past session, a coalition of organizations attempted to pass paid sick days and safe days for all working Mainers. The bill, even when reduced to simply protecting workers who are sick from not being fired for having to say home, did not come close to passing. I am committed to this issue and will continue working to find a compromise that protects workers as a legislator.

9) How can the government of Maine keep our youth from leaving and attract new youth to the State?

This is a crucial issue. I moved to Maine when I was 23 because I had a job offer at a local non-profit in Portland. The job didn't pay a lot, but had good benefits and I felt I would be able to support myself as a single woman with no children. When I talk to people my age and younger, staying in Maine depends on the ability to find a job they like that pays a fair wage and has good benefits. It is also important to feel as though you will have upward mobility and the chance to continue in your chosen field. Job creation is essential, as well as improving our education system to produce a ready workforce. There must also be opportunities for continuing your education.

I also know that where I lived was important to me as I settled in Maine. I want Maine to continue to provide programs that allow younger people to purchase homes and build equity, like the programs offered by the Maine State Housing Authority. I am also dedicated to transportation alternatives that allow us to get around Maine without having to drive, making a commute from Portland to work elsewhere much more affordable. Finally, I think a culture of diversity and acceptance attracts younger people to our state. Knowing that you will have basic protections regardless of any difference and the ability to marry your chosen partner appeals to a younger generation.

10) How would you improve access to healthcare in Maine? What steps would you take to improve Dirigo Health? Do you support single payer healthcare?

I do support single payer healthcare. However, since I received this survey, we passed the first step in federal healthcare reform. It is important to implement this effectively in our state, which is why I am glad Maine will have a Joint Select Committee on Health Care Reform Opportunities and Implementation over the summer and into next fall. The committee will look at single payer and if it can be implemented as part of the federal reform. Some states may be allowed to run their own public option or single payer programs.

In terms of implementation, it is going to be essential to cover as many people possible before 2014, with the help of early adoption and grant funding. Dirigo could be part of this process, or it could be a transitional policy as implementation of the federal reform continues. There are improvements to be made to Dirigo, such as the affordability, less barriers to signing up and more people being allowed to buy in. The federal reform will make several changes to the insurance marketplace, changes that are long overdue.

The committee will make a report of their recommendations, including proposed legislation by November 3rd of 2010. I am looking forward to carefully reviewing that report.