

Questions for State Representative Candidates

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

First and foremost, we need to get our financial house in order. We've promised, by law, to fund the major part of local education costs. Yet, year after year, we never even come close. We've promised state workers and teachers a decent pension, yet we've already spent nearly half the funds set aside to do just that. We promise to pay our hospitals and doctors for the cost of treating the uninsured, yet we drag out those payments so long they settle for a fraction of the billed amount.

We should be outraged that this goes on! It's irresponsible, probably even illegal. Yet, we continue to do it.

It seems to me, then, that we don't have "three biggest issues" as much as one issue that has at least three major ramifications. Now, only two short years ago, we were furious at those money lenders who were giving out huge mortgages to people who had no jobs or other apparent means of repaying such a mortgage. What they did made no economic or moral sense at all; it never should have happened and look at the disaster it is causing. But, our Maine state government is doing just about the same thing, making commitments far beyond our ability to pay. This has to change.

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)?

The poor, the homeless, those with mental and physical disabilities all need to be heard in Augusta, not marginalized. I believe we can keep funding for social services intact without adding to our current budget. How? In these dire economic circumstances, that will not be easy and will entail rearranging current priorities, which I get into in the following question. Funding directed toward the "marginalized" is not an area where I see a lot of bloated balance sheets or inflated salaries. Obviously, however, I'm not so sure that we can greatly increase funding beyond present levels.

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?

You claim that "**Augusta has been committed to only dealing with one side of the budget, by cutting expenses.**" -- I'm not at all sure that I accept your premise. I'm not at all sure that Augusta has been thorough enough at cutting some expenses. I still see a lot of inappropriate spending; so until more of that is addressed, I am opposed to raising revenues. Until we rework BETR or until we figure out a system that does not "reward" a school for labeling upwards of 40% of its students as "special needs," I'd have to look long and hard at most proposals to increase revenues.

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 like Amtrak. I've ridden it on occasion. But I simply don't know how the state can ever possibly "make up any shortfall in federal funding." The operation, from day one, has never ever come close to being self-sufficient. And now they want to add a sleeping car. That, to me, does not seem prudent for a railroad that can't currently make ends meet.

I like flying, too; but I can't always afford to take a plane wherever I go. Still, if we got rid of even one B-2 bomber (And they're all just gathering dust and rust.), then we could free up enough money to subsidize Amtrak clear to Fort Kent. And I could live with that. It would still be a subsidy, and I'm not real happy with that aspect; but it's a far more productive use of federal monies than is a bomber that can and should never be put to use.

In like manner, we have over 244 million private cars on the roads today. That's about one each for every citizen old enough to drive. So, with that many cars already on the road, how badly do we need any particular car manufacturer? Yet, the entire federal government saw fit to fund a bailout of General Motors to the tune of over \$60 billion. If GM had gone out of business, it would have taken months before people here in Maine ever noticed the difference! We did not have to save GM!

Maine needs to rearrange its priorities. The Feds need to do the same thing. Had those same GM bailout dollars been directed into public transport or repairing roads, rails and bridges, you would not have to ask the above question. We don't need to raise new tax dollars to support public transport. We're already spending several fortunes on public transit, not only here but in several other countries! But our results are terrible. We spend more on highways in Iraq—blowing them up and then repairing them—than we do on all the highways of New England. Let's rearrange our priorities.

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?

Do I support a constitutional amendment denying a couple the right to be married? No.

Do I support the right of all people to be "wedded" formally by secular contract ensuring the same rights, benefits, privileges, and legal consequences as exist for the thing called marriage? Yes,

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

The best thing one can do to support immigrants and refugees is ensure that Maine has a vibrant and strong economy. As the Lewiston-Auburn area illustrates, immigrants and refugees can play a major role in creating such a lively economy. The immigrant population there is a real asset to the community, not a drain upon its resources. In Portland, I can easily see immigrants and refugees playing a much larger role in creating new businesses and expanding existing ones. The more support we provide them (and that doesn't always have to mean "financial" support), the quicker this can happen--especially if they feel empowered with the right to vote.

I am aware of and fully support the goals of and rationale behind the local referendum that will be held in November to allow legal immigrants to vote in elections for City Council and School Board.

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

The best thing one can do to support our youth and attract new youth to Maine is to ensure that Maine has a vibrant and strong economy. (See above answer.) The schools have an important role to play here too. Having a system that is filled with dedicated and motivated teachers would be most helpful. Alas, we have one that makes it nearly impossible to keep teachers motivated. It's extremely rare to have a poor teacher be fired, no matter how badly he does his job. What does that say to the better teachers? It doesn't need to be this way.

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 still have much to learn about healthcare in Maine. I do hear that New Hampshire residents seem to pay much, much less there than we do in Maine for comparable coverage, so that makes me inclined to support allowing out-of-state insurers to sell here in Maine.

I do not believe that Dirigo Health can be "improved." That implies that it was somewhat good to begin with, an assumption that doesn't appear to be valid from my perspective.

At present, I can not support any of the single payer healthcare proposals I have seen to date. I haven't closed the door on that concept, but I'm leaning strongly in that direction.

Respectfully submitted,
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