

Questions for State Representative Candidates

Your name: Stephen Lovejoy
Your home address: 46 Norwood Street, Portland, ME 04103
Your email address: steve.lovejoy@myfairpoint.net
Your phone number: home 773-5538, cell 671-5333
Your website:
Other blog/social media sites you use: Facebook

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

1. The budget shortfalls are going to be the biggest issue we will be facing. Given the shortfalls we will be facing there will potentially be major cuts in many areas, and protecting those most in need and cuts to education will be major parts of this. Tax increases should be on the table, but after the voter repeal of the tax reform bill it may be difficult to generate support for considering it. Yet we can't dismantle all of the programs we have, or shortchange kids on education!
2. Education will continue to be a priority. We want to attract more employers who pay a good living wage, and we need to have an educated and skilled workforce to do that. We will need to continue to look for ways to make education more attainable for all students, and to make the system more accountable to parents and students. However, that will also require more involvement by the parents.
3. Economic development will be a key for the state for the foreseeable future. We need to develop and attract companies that pay livable wages and bring attractive jobs to our state. Keys will be the workforce development and more marketing of Maine as a desirable place to locate based upon our quality of place.

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)?

We need to continue to try and protect all of those in need. There will be pressure to cut back on services due to the budget issues, but we have to recognize that cutting back in one area will merely shift costs to another area, such as police services or emergency room services. We have to try and balance out the safety net with the budget issues. We cannot pretend that cutbacks in one area will happen in a vacuum and not create more problems elsewhere, or merely shift them from one area to another in our decision making.

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?

Earlier this year I tried to introduce a bill to allow a county wide sales tax if counties chose to do so. I chose a county structure so that we wouldn't pit, for example, South Portland versus Raymond on the issue. There was no support for an increase in state taxes in the legislature, and I had hoped that we could bring the decision do to a more local level to allow us the possibility. The referendum on tax reform repealed the attempt at a change in our tax structure, which indicates we are going to continue to have difficulty in making meaningful reform. However, we do have to seek additional funding in some manner or we will have to

make devastating cuts that will have severe long term repercussions. In the past we have done a temporary increase of one cent in the sales tax, and I believe that we have to consider that again. However, we also need to look at broadening the sales tax (as the recent attempt at tax reform tried to do) as well.

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?

Every country that has passenger rail service that I am aware of has to provide subsidies, and I certainly don't see the US being any different, at least not until we have a lot more usage. I do want to see the service continue, and I believe it requires federal funding. One of the issues with the Downeaster has been that New Hampshire didn't pitch in and share all of the costs that got it up and running. I would not favor Maine picking up the shortfall unless New Hampshire and Massachusetts also participated in the funding equally. We cannot foot the bill and have NH getting a free ride.

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 a co-sponsor on Senator Damon's bill and I was very disappointed in the results of the referendum. I hope that we will be able to put together an educational effort and put this issue back into the legislative process.

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

Many of the immigrant population have skills and are willing to work hard, the problem is finding appropriate employment. We need to continue education efforts to give them the skills and knowledge to find and keep employment. This included continued efforts in our schools to help ESL students achieve the same educational levels as our traditional students. In addition, at least here in Portland, we need to work on community building and acceptance. One other area I would like to see changes in is the path to citizenship. It appears to have been too expensive for many, and we need to find ways to help immigrants achieve citizenship.

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

The keys are education, and then well paying jobs that use that education. Too many young people leave the state to find good paying jobs elsewhere. We need to provide quality education that is also affordable in higher education. The Opportunity Maine program is a step in the right direction, but appears to be under used and not widely known. We do need to continue to promote that program to help students afford their education, and also help keep them here in Maine. It is a tool, but even then it depends upon those students finding a job that allows them to grow and make a quality wage. We need to look at sectors that we have the workforce for, and then try and attract those businesses, or support homegrown companies that can compete in the market.

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 a single payer system. As the only developed country in the world without a single payer system we need to reconsider how we approach healthcare. However, that is going to take a nationwide effort to educate on how it will change the system in order to get this passed at a federal level. I have hopes that the recently passed reforms will help to take away some of the fears that have been developed by the supporters of the current system.

While we have made some progress with Dirigo, it is still so narrowly available that we have never really reached any economy of scale, nor have we broadened out the client base enough to balance out the needs within the portfolio. We do need to keep Dirigo in place, but we do need to watch the costs versus the benefits, and the types of limitations we have placed on the system in terms of new applicants.