

**STATE OF MAINE
ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-FIRST LEGISLATURE
SECOND REGULAR SESSION
JOURNAL OF THE SENATE**

In Senate Chamber
Wednesday
March 27, 2024

Senate called to order by President Troy D. Jackson of Aroostook County.

Prayer by Reverend Lisle Blind of St. Ann's Episcopal Church in Windham.

REVEREND LISLE BLIND: Good morning. It is a privilege and honor to be here. I am Deacon at St. Ann's Episcopal Church in Windham, and in the rest of my everyday life, I am a trauma therapist. In my denomination, this week is Holy Week, a solemn week leading up to Easter. It is always important, though, to remember that it ends in joy. Much like life, when we have to cope with difficulties and traumas, we have to keep our eyes on things that bring us joy. And as the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, once said, when I pray, coincidences happen; when I don't, they don't. Please join me, if you feel comfortable, in prayer. May God fill each person here with the joy of following their passion. May God help each of us know that we are loved by God. May God help each person here to be aware that they will be -- that God will be with them no matter what they have to do this day. May each of you here today find yourselves held in the knowledge that you matter. Not just your work or your bills, but you. You make a difference in this world. May you know that God knows your worst heartaches and your greatest triumphs. What you do always matters. Every prayer is an earnest hope or wish. I pray that if we have such a request on our hearts that we let it -- we ask it now silently to whatever greater power we believe in. Let us pray for the families and those who are in the Baltimore -- involved in the Baltimore bridge disaster. Let us also pray for those who are alone, lost, grieving, or in need, known and unknown, that they may find hope and health. Amen.

National Anthem Performed by Cheverus High School Vocal Ensemble of Portland.

Pledge of Allegiance led by Senator Cameron D. Reny of Lincoln County.

Reading of the Journal of Tuesday, March 26, 2024.

Off Record Remarks

THE PRESIDENT: At this time, the Chair is going to start before our Senate Calendar to recognize the recipients of the 2024 Legislative Memorial Scholarship Awards. Each year, the Maine Legislature recognizes one student from each county who is currently pursuing or planning to pursue education at a two- or four-year Maine college or technical school. Awards are given to a Maine resident high school senior or full- or part-time postsecondary student accepted to or enrolled in any accredited Maine college for graduate or undergraduate degrees. The Chair would call your attention to the handouts that have been distributed on your desks of the recipients. First, I'm going to recognize the recipients who were not able to be here today. From Androscoggin County is Brianna Letourneau of Lewiston. Brianna majors in Elementary Education at St. Joseph College. The recipient from Aroostook County is Logan Bernier of Easton. Logan majors in Nursing at the Northern Maine Community College. The recipient from Knox County is Anna Carpenter of Camden. Anna majors in Justice Studies at the University of Maine at Augusta. The recipient from Lincoln County is Jacob Rousseau of Whitefield. Jacob is a Marine Biology and Small Vessel Operations major at Maine Maritime Academy. The recipient from Penobscot County is Noah Tibbetts of Brewer. Noah majors in Nursing at St. Joseph's College. The recipient from Somerset County is Hannah Robinson of Pittsfield. Hannah is a Communications Science and Disorders major at the University of Maine at Orono. The recipient from Washington County is Emmalee Donahue-Ripley of Cherryfield. Emmalee has a career studies interest in Medical Radiography at Eastern Maine Community College. The recipient from York County is Emily DeSimone of Waterboro. Emily majors in Elementary Education at the University of Maine at Farmington. The Chair definitely wants to congratulate all these recipients. Hopefully -- well, we'll get those checks out to them, and we want to wish them all their best in their academic endeavors. So, now we're going to recognize the recipients that were able to join us today. As the recipient is called, the Sargeant-at-Arms is going to escort the student, with their guests and the Senator, to the Well of the Chamber to receive the award. The recipient from Cumberland County is Morgan Fucso of Bridgton. Morgan is an Applied Science and Radiologic -- Radiology Technology major at the Maine College of Health Professions. Morgan is here today with her parents, Michael, and Amanda. Will the Sargeant-at-Arms please escort Morgan and her family along with the Senator from Oxford, Senator Bennett, to the front of the Chamber? The recipient from Franklin County is Emma Towers of Jay. Emma majors in Psychology at the University of Maine in Farmington. Emma is here today with her mother, Lynelle Morin-Towers, and her father, Chris Towers, her friend Kayden Haylock. Will the Sargeant-at-Arms please escort Emma and her family along with the Senator from Oxford, Senator Keim? The recipient from Hancock County is Elaina Thomas of Sullivan. Elaina majors in Elementary Education at the University of Maine at Machias. Elaina is here today with her mother, Colleen Thomas. Will the Sargeant-at-Arms please escort Elaina and her mother along with the Senator from Washington, Senator Moore, to the front of the Chamber? The recipient from Kennebec County is Brooke Belz of Winthrop. Brooke is a Nursing major at the University of Maine at Orono, and Brooke is here today with her parents, Darryl and Susan. Will the Sargeant-at-Arms please escort Brooke and her family, along with the Senator from Kennebec, Senator Hickman, to the

front of the Chamber?

The recipient from Oxford County is William Valdimir McCarthy of Sumner. William is a Business and Liberal Arts major at Thomas College. William is here today with his mother, Kate McCarthy, and sister, Cheyenne Goroshin. Will the Sergeant-at-Arms please escort William and his family, along with the Senator from Oxford, Senator Keim, to the front of the Chamber?

The recipient from Piscataquis County is Alexa Bjork of Greenville Junction. Alexa majors in Psychology at the University of Maine - Southern Maine. Alexa is here today with her mother, ~~SUSA~~. Will the Sergeant-at-Arms please escort Alexa and her family, along with the Senator from Penobscot County, Senator Guerin, to the front of the Chamber?

The recipient from Sagadahoc County is Natalie Emmerson of Woolwich. Natalie majors in Government History at Bowdoin College. Natalie is here today with her father, Dean Emmerson, exchange brother, Tamas Weisz of Hungary, and exchange sister Bianca Harea of Moldova. Will the Sergeant-at-Arms please escort Natalie and her family, along with the Senator from Sagadahoc, Senator Vitelli, to the front of the Chamber?

The recipient from Waldo County is Audra Faulkingham of Swanville. Audra is a Business major at the University of Southern Maine. Audra is here today with her mother, Jennifer Armstrong. Will the Sergeant-at-Arms please escort Audra and her family along with the Senator from Waldo, Senator Curry, to the front of the Chamber?

So, I think, according to the Secretary and myself, we've captured everyone that was an award winner here today. I certainly want to give congratulations to each student that's received the award. We want to thank you for your efforts and wish you the best of luck going forward in your endeavors. And I certainly want to say that, you know, the Members of the Legislature, legislative staff, and everyone else who volunteered, donated items, participated and contributed to the scholarship fund, it was another successful year for that scholarship fund. It's always rewarding to see those results, you know, the great awardees that came forward, and certainly going to be looking forward to the great things that they're going to do in the coming years. And once again, I want to thank all of them that are here, congratulate all of them that are here, and certainly the ones that weren't able to be here today, so once again, congratulations, nice job, really appreciate your efforts.

Senator **MOORE** of Washington requested and received leave of the Senate that members and staff be allowed to remove their jackets for the remainder of this Legislative Day.

Off Record Remarks

COMMUNICATIONS

The Following Communication: S.C. 1051

**STATE OF MAINE
ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY FIRST LEGISLATURE
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION**

TO: Senator Craig Hickman, Senate Chair
Representative Jessica Fay, House Chair
Government Oversight Committee

FROM: Senator Ben Chipman, Senate Chair
Representative Lydia Crafts, House Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Transportation

Quasi-Independent State Entity Reviews of the Maine Turnpike Authority, Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority, and Maine Port Authority

March 26, 2024

The Joint Standing Committee on Transportation is pleased to report the results of the its review of the Maine Turnpike Authority, Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority, and Maine Port Authority pursuant to the laws governing quasi-independent state entities in Title 5, chapter 379, subchapter 3 of the Maine Revised Statutes.

As required by Title 5, section 12023, subsection 3, the committee met to review each quasi-independent entity's annual reports to the Legislature for the previous two calendar years to assess whether policies adopted by each entity are consistent with the requirements of Title 5, section 12022, subsections 3 to 5, and whether reported waivers of competitive procurement and contributions are in compliance with adopted policies. After review, the committee is pleased to report that it did not find any inconsistencies between the entities' policies and procedures and that it did not find any of the entities' reported waivers of competitive procurement and reported contributions to be out of compliance with the policies and procedures.

Thank you for your opportunity to report to you on these matters.

Sincerely,

S/Benjamin M. Chipman
Senate Chair

S/Lydia V. Crafts
House Chair

READ and ORDERED PLACED ON FILE.

The Following Communication: S.C. 1047

**STATE OF MAINE
SUPREME JUDICIAL COURT**

March 22, 2024

Darek M. Grant
Secretary of the Senate
Office of the Secretary of the Senate
3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Robert B. Hunt
Clerk of the House
Office of the Clerk of the House

2 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

R. of Topsham, Osher, L. of
Orono, Shaw, K. of Auburn

Edward A. Charbonneau, Esq.
Revisor of Statutes
Office of the Revisor of Statutes
Room 108, State House
Augusta, Maine 04333

NAYS 0

ABSENT 3 Sen. Ingwersen, H. of York,
Sen. Black, R. of Franklin,
Rep. Costain, D. of Plymouth

Dear Secretary Grant, Clerk Hunt, and Revisor Charbonneau,

In accordance with the Legislature's authorization to arrange the Constitution in 2024 following the 2023 arrangement, enclosed please find the 2024 rearranged Constitution of the State of Maine.

Very truly yours,

S/Valerie Stanfill
Chief Justice

READ and ORDERED PLACED ON FILE.

The Following Communication: S.C. 1048

**STATE OF MAINE
ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY FIRST LEGISLATURE
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION AND
FORESTRY**

March 25, 2024

The Honorable Troy Dale Jackson
President of the Senate of Maine
131st Maine State Legislature
State House
Augusta, Maine 04333-0003

Dear Mr. President:

In accordance with 3 M.R.S.A., Section 157, and with Joint Rule 505 of the Maine Legislature, the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry has had under consideration the nomination of Catherine Robbins-Halsted of Searsmont, for reappointment to the Land For Maine's Future Board.

After public hearing and discussion on this nomination, the Committee proceeded to vote on the motion to recommend to the Senate that this nomination be confirmed. The Committee Clerk called the roll with the following result:

YEAS	Senators	1	Hickman, C. of Kennebec
	Representatives	9	Pluecker, B. of Warren, Cray, D. of Palmyra, Guerrette, T. of Caribou, Hall, R. of Wilton, Hepler, A. of Woolwich, Jackson, C. of Oxford, Jauch,

Ten members of the Committee having voted in the affirmative and zero in the negative, it was the vote of the Committee that the nomination of Catherine Robbins-Halsted of Searsmont, for reappointment to the Land For Maine's Future Board be confirmed.

Signed,

S/Henry Ingwersen
Senate Chair

S/Bill Pluecker
House Chair

READ and ORDERED PLACED ON FILE.

The President laid before the Senate the following: "Shall the recommendation of the Committee on **AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY** be overridden?"

The Chair noted the absence of the Senator from Androscoggin, Senator **BRAKEY**, and further excused the same Senators from today's Roll Call votes.

In accordance with 3 M.R.S.A., Chapter 6, Section 158, and with Joint Rule 506 of the 131st Legislature, the vote was taken by the Yeas and Nays.

The Doorkeepers secured the Chamber.

The Secretary opened the vote.

ROLL CALL (#623)

YEAS: Senators: None

NAYS: Senators: BAILEY, BALDACCI, BEEBE-CENTER, BENNETT, BLACK, BRENNER, CARNEY, CHIPMAN, CURRY, DAUGHTRY, DUSON, FARRIN, GROHOSKI, GUERIN, HARRINGTON, HICKMAN, INGWERSEN, KEIM, LAFOUNTAIN, LAWRENCE, LIBBY, LYFORD, MOORE, NANGLE, PIERCE, POULIOT, RAFFERTY, RENY, ROTUNDO, STEWART, TIMBERLAKE, TIPPING, VITELLI, PRESIDENT JACKSON

EXCUSED: Senator: BRAKEY

No Senator having voted in the affirmative and 34 Senators having voted in the negative, with 1 Senator being excused, and none being less than two-thirds of the Membership present and voting, it was the vote of the Senate that the Committee's recommendation be **ACCEPTED** and the nomination of **Catherine Robbins-Halsted** of Searsmont for reappointment to the Land For Maine's Future Board was **CONFIRMED**.

The Secretary has so informed the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

The Following Communication: S.C. 1049

**STATE OF MAINE
ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY FIRST LEGISLATURE
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION AND
FORESTRY**

March 25, 2024

The Honorable Troy Dale Jackson
President of the Senate of Maine
131st Maine State Legislature
State House
Augusta, Maine 04333-0003

Dear Mr. President:

In accordance with 3 M.R.S.A., Section 157, and with Joint Rule 505 of the Maine Legislature, the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry has had under consideration the nomination of Beth A. Schiller of Bowdoinham, for appointment to the Land For Maine's Future Board.

After public hearing and discussion on this nomination, the Committee proceeded to vote on the motion to recommend to the Senate that this nomination be confirmed. The Committee Clerk called the roll with the following result:

YEAS	Senators	1	Hickman, C. of Kennebec
	Representatives	9	Pluecker, B. of Warren, Cray, D. of Palmyra, Guerrette, T. of Caribou, Hall, R. of Wilton, Hepler, A. of Woolwich, Jackson, C. of Oxford, Jauch, R. of Topsham, Osher, L. of Orono, Shaw, K. of Auburn
NAYS		0	
ABSENT		3	Sen. Ingwersen, H. of York, Sen. Black, R. of Franklin, Rep. Costain, D. of Plymouth

Ten members of the Committee having voted in the affirmative and zero in the negative, it was the vote of the Committee that the nomination of Beth A. Schiller of Bowdoinham, for appointment to the Land For Maine's Future Board be confirmed.

Signed,

S/Henry Ingwersen
Senate Chair

S/Bill Pluecker
House Chair

READ and ORDERED PLACED ON FILE.

The President laid before the Senate the following: "Shall the recommendation of the Committee on **AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY** be overridden?"

In accordance with 3 M.R.S.A., Chapter 6, Section 158, and with Joint Rule 506 of the 131st Legislature, the vote was taken by the Yeas and Nays.

The Doorkeepers secured the Chamber.

The Secretary opened the vote.

ROLL CALL (#624)

YEAS: Senators: None

NAYS: Senators: BAILEY, BALDACCI, BEEBE-CENTER, BENNETT, BLACK, BRAKEY, BRENNER, CARNEY, CHIPMAN, CURRY, DAUGHTRY, DUSON, FARRIN, GROHOSKI, GUERIN, HARRINGTON, HICKMAN, INGWERSEN, KEIM, LAFOUNTAIN, LAWRENCE, LIBBY, LYFORD, MOORE, NANGLE, PIERCE, POULIOT, RAFFERTY, RENY, ROTUNDO, STEWART, TIMBERLAKE, TIPPING, VITELLI, PRESIDENT JACKSON

No Senator having voted in the affirmative and 35 Senators having voted in the negative, and none being less than two-thirds of the Membership present and voting, it was the vote of the Senate that the Committee's recommendation be **ACCEPTED** and the nomination of **Beth A. Schiller** of Bowdoinham for appointment to the Land For Maine's Future Board was **CONFIRMED**.

The Secretary has so informed the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

The Following Communication: S.C. 1050

**STATE OF MAINE
ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY FIRST LEGISLATURE
COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL
RESOURCES**

March 26, 2024

Honorable Troy Dale Jackson, Senate President
Honorable Rachel Talbot Ross, Speaker of the House
131st Maine State Legislature

State House
Augusta, Maine 04333

Dear President Jackson and Speaker Talbot Ross:

Pursuant to Joint Rule 310, we are writing to notify you that we have approved the request by the bill sponsor Rep. Fay of Raymond, to report the following bill Leave to Withdraw:

L.D. 277 An Act Regarding Perfluoroalkyl and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances

Sincerely,

S/Sen. Stacy Brenner
Senate Chair

S/Rep. Lori Gramlich
House Chair

READ and with accompanying papers **ORDERED PLACED ON FILE.**

The Following Communication: S.C. 1045

**STATE OF MAINE
ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY FIRST LEGISLATURE
COMMITTEE ON HEALTH COVERAGE, INSURANCE
AND FINANCIAL SERVICES**

March 22, 2024

Honorable Troy Dale Jackson, President of the Senate
Honorable Rachel Talbot Ross, Speaker of the House
131st Legislature
State House
Augusta, Maine 04333

Dear President Jackson and Speaker Talbot Ross:

Pursuant to Joint Rule 310, we are writing to notify you that the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services has voted unanimously to report the following bill(s) out "Ought Not to Pass":

L.D. 1793 Resolve, Directing the Department of Health and Human Services to Contract for Discounted Insulin Manufactured and Distributed by Civica Rx

This is notification of the Committee's action.

Sincerely,

S/Sen. Donna Bailey
Senate Chair

S/Rep. Anne C. Perry
House Chair

READ and with accompanying papers **ORDERED PLACED ON FILE.**

The Following Communication: S.C. 1046

**STATE OF MAINE
ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY FIRST LEGISLATURE
JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON HOUSING**

March 21, 2024

Honorable Troy Dale Jackson, President of the Senate
Honorable Rachel Talbot Ross, Speaker of the House
131st Legislature
State House
Augusta, Maine 04333

Dear President Jackson and Speaker Talbot Ross:

Pursuant to Joint Rule 310, we are writing to notify you that the Joint Standing Committee on Housing has voted unanimously to report the following bill(s) out "Ought Not to Pass":

L.D. 1672 An Act to Establish an Affordable Housing Permitting Process

This is notification of the Committee's action.

Sincerely,

S/Sen. Teresa S. Pierce
Senate Chair

S/Rep. Traci Gere
House Chair

READ and with accompanying papers **ORDERED PLACED ON FILE.**

Off Record Remarks

ORDERS

Joint Orders

Expressions of Legislative Sentiment recognizing:

Emerson Homa, of Gorham, who received the 7th annual Becky Shaffer Award, given to the top senior girls hockey player in Maine. We extend our congratulations and best wishes;
SLS 1697

Sponsored by Senator BRENNER of Cumberland.
Cosponsored by Representatives: BOYLE of Gorham, TERRY of Gorham.

The Joint Order was **READ**.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from Cumberland, Senator Brenner.

Senator **BRENNER:** Thank you, Mr. President, and Colleagues of the Senate. It is a great pleasure that I have the opportunity to honor this shining star in our community, a young athlete whose

dedication, talent, and passion have set her apart as a true standout in the world of high school hockey. I am, of course, referring to Emerson Homa, a senior at Gorham High School. A remarkable woman whose stellar performance on the ice has earned her the prestigious title of the best girl's hockey player in Maine and being awarded with the esteemed Becky Shaffer Award. Emerson, who plays as a forward, led the state with 45 goals in 21 games this season, while helping Gorham reach the South Regional Final. Emerson is captain of the Gorham girl's co-op hockey team. The Gorham co-op hockey team is composed of students from Gorham, Fryeburg, Massabesic, and Bonny Eagle. Emerson is a field hockey player in the fall, hockey player in the winter, and lacrosse player in the spring. Her hard work and perseverance is an inspiration to all. Emerson will also travel with the hockey travel team to the national championships later this fall -- later this year. I'd like to also extend a heartfelt congratulations to her family, her coaches, and her amazing support system around her, including her mom, who's with her today. On behalf of the people of Maine, I offer my sincerest congratulations and best wishes to you, Emerson, for your continued success in all your future endeavors. Thank you for being such an outstanding ambassador for our state and being an inspiration for showing up and for the power of hard work and for the belief in oneself. Thank you.

The Joint Order was **PASSED**.

Sent down for concurrence.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair is very pleased to thank and recognize in the rear of the chamber Emerson Homa and her mother, Carlye Homan of the town of Gorham. They are the guests today of the Senator from Cumberland, Senator Brenner and the entire Maine Senate. Would the guests please rise and accept the congratulations and greetings of the Maine Senate.

Off Record Remarks

Jonny Lettre, of Augusta, a student at Cony High School and a member of the wrestling team, who won his third Class A State Championship in the 285-pound Weight Class. During the season, Jonny had his 100th career win. We extend our congratulations and best wishes;
SLS 1707

Sponsored by Senator POULIOT of Kennebec.
Cosponsored by Representatives: BRIDGEO of Augusta, LaROCHELLE of Augusta.

The Joint Order was **READ**.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from Kennebec, Senator Pouliot.

Senator **POULIOT:** Good morning, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Senate. It is my pleasure to be standing before you today to recognize a young man who has helped to generate a good deal of history for Cony High School's wrestling program in recent

years. This winter, Jonny Lettre, who's sitting behind me - I feel much safer about that, by the way - was able to bring home his third Class A wrestling title, and did so capping off his high school career in a home mat title match. I have no doubt just how special this occasion was for him and his family and the teammates. It goes without saying what a remarkable and rare accomplishment it is to be able to rattle off multiple state championship seasons like he has, but similarly - I always struggle with that word, Mr. President, I don't know why - impressive is Jonny's attitude, character, and leadership qualities that he consistently brings to the table, and have been able to attested by those on the team. Head coach Shawn Totman has been quoted saying that he lives and breathes the sport. Other kids see that. It makes it fun because he always looks forward to coming to practice and he loves meets and tournaments. Other teammates have likewise noticed the energy he brings to the table, and brings out the best in everybody around him, that he will never hesitate to go out of his way to help his teammates. Jonny follows in the footsteps of his cousin, Aaron Lettre, who was an individual state title winner at 182 pounds back in 2019, and he is the second three-time state champion for Cony High School, joining Bill Brochu's run from '92 to '94. It's my understanding that Jonny intends to pursue his wrestling career beyond high school level, and I'm very much looking forward to seeing his future leadership in the sport, Mr. President. I also want to briefly close by recognizing his guest today, the athletic director for the school, TJ Maines and Sarah Lettre, his mother. Thank you for being here and thank you for your support of Jonny during his tenure on the team. Thank you, Mr. President.

The Joint Order was **PASSED**.

Sent down for concurrence.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair is very pleased to recognize in the rear of the chamber Jonny Lettre, Sarah Lettre, his mother, and the Athletic Director TJ Maine. They're all from the city of Augusta and are the guests today of the Senator from Kennebec, Senator Pouliot and the entire Maine Senate. Would they please rise and accept the greetings and congratulations of the Maine Senate.

The Upper Kennebec Valley High School Boys Basketball Team, of Bingham, which won the Class D South Championship. We extend our congratulations and best wishes;
SLS 1708

Sponsored by Senator BLACK of Franklin.
Cosponsored by Representative: DUNPHY of Embden.

The Upper Kennebec Valley High School Girls Basketball Team, of Bingham, which won the Class D South Championship. We extend our congratulations and best wishes;
SLS 1709

Sponsored by Senator BLACK of Franklin.
Cosponsored by Representative: DUNPHY of Embden.

The Joint Orders were **READ**.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from Franklin, Senator Black.

Senator **BLACK:** Thank you, Mr. President. Good morning, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Senate. I'm standing before you today to recognize a pair of teams whose recent efforts have gone a long ways in restoring the winning culture of the Upper Kennebec Valley High School with a 71-26 victory over Waynflete back in February '24, the girls squad secured the Class D South Regional Title for the Cavaliers for the first time since 2009. And marked by efficient and fundamental sound style of play, enforcement of coaches of Gordon Hartwell and Crystal Rollins, who are here today with us. One statistic that came from that title game that really flew off the page and emphasized this point was the fact that their opponent was forced into ten turnovers by this Valley squad before scoring their first point with 5:29 left to go in the first quarter. Outstanding job, ladies, and congratulations. Pivoting to the boys' side of things, they did just the same by securing a hard-fought victory over Saint Dominic Academy with a 45-36 win. After consecutive losses to Forest Hill in the regional finals in '22 and '23, they finally got over the hump and earned their first South title since 2016. Personally, my favorite thing as I read about this squad that makes -- that thinks -- that I think speaks volumes about their ability to secure this 35-28 rebounding edge in the South title game despite their opponents having a decisive size advantage with every starter being over six-feet tall. Their victory in that game can mostly be attributed to a staunch defensive effort, which really speaks to the team's strengths and style of play instilled by their excellent coaches, Mike Staples and Darren and Dylan Beane, also with us today. It is always a pleasure to be able to welcome teams from my district and celebrate their latest triumphs. All of you should hold your heads high for the progress you have contributed to in the recent years, and I look forward to seeing both teams back here next year to celebrate your eventual state titles. Thank you for being here today.

The Joint Orders were **PASSED**.

Sent down for concurrence.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair is very pleased to recognize up in the balcony the Upper Kennebec Valley High School Boys and Girls Basketball Teams, they're joined by Britani Cabassa their Athletic Director, and Head Coaches Mike Staples and Gordon Hartwell, Assistant Coaches Darren Beane, Dillon Beane, and Crystal Rollins. They're all from Bingham. They are the guests today of the Senator from Somerset, Senator Black and the entire Maine Senate. Would the guests please rise and accept the congratulations of the Maine Senate.

Morgan Zetts, of Bethel, a senior at Telstar High School and a member of the girls basketball team, who recently scored her 1,000th career point. We extend our congratulations and best wishes;
SLS 1710

Sponsored by Senator KEIM of Oxford.
Cosponsored by Representative: HENDERSON of Rumford.

The Joint Order was **READ**.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from Oxford, Senator Keim.

Senator **KEIM:** Thank you, Mr. President. I rise today to speak about an incredible young leader, athlete, and scholar from Bethel, Morgan Zetts. Morgan is a senior at Telstar High School in Bethel. She has been co-president of the student council with the same students since middle school. She is in the National Honor Society and has been class president for three years. Beyond her leadership and grades, Morgan is an extraordinary athlete. In the fall, she is a soccer star, and in the spring, she is a softball star. This year, she was captain of the soccer team. Morgan certainly inherited some basketball genes. Both her parents played basketball when they were students at Telstar also. She has been playing the sport since she was three years old. As a dynamic player and strong leader, she was chosen to be the team's captain. Given her leadership experience, it is no surprise she did a great job as captain. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, the start of Morgan's high school basketball career was difficult. During her freshman year, they didn't play at all. During her sophomore year, there were only six players. For a sport that has five players, it was exhausting with hardly any substitutes. Her junior year, they got a new coach, Mr. Newell, who is beloved, and had nine players. This last year, they had 14. As a team captain, Morgan worked closely with the coaches to help the younger players who didn't know the fundamentals. As a year-round player, she has been able to help others improve their shooting and ball handling skills. She also spends time each winter coaching for Bethel Rec. After scoring her 1,000th point, Morgan's coach, Alec Newell, said the ability to put this ball in that basket takes dedication, practice, and incredible hard work. But this goes beyond Morgan Zetts and her 23 points a game and 15 rebounds. Morgan is a class teammate and a great captain and an awesome person. Everyone who knows Morgan agrees with that statement. Morgan plans to pursue a career in nursing. Her family is filled with nurses and she always wanted to go into the field of health because she loves people and helping people. To prepare, she has taken almost every single science class offered at Telstar. The support in Morgan's life is obvious because she is here today surrounded by her family. I know that Morgan has a bright future ahead of her, and I thank you all in joining me in congratulating Morgan Zetts on this incredible accomplishment.

The Joint Order was **PASSED**.

Sent down for concurrence.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair is very pleased to recognize in the rear of the chamber Morgan Zetts, Matt, Trista and Makinley Zetts, Avery, Addie, Carrie and Amos Kimball. They're all from Bethel. They are the guests today of the Senator from Oxford, Senator Keim. Would they please rise and accept the greetings and congratulations of the Maine Senate.

Off Record Remarks

All matters thus acted upon were ordered sent down forthwith for concurrence.

Senate at Ease.

The Senate was called to order by the President.

Off Record Remarks

Out of order and under suspension of the Rules, the Senate considered the following:

PAPERS FROM THE HOUSE

Joint Resolution

The following Joint Resolution:
H.P. 1465

**JOINT RESOLUTION
RECOGNIZING THE MUSLIM CELEBRATION OF
THE HOLY MONTH OF RAMADAN**

WHEREAS, Ramadan is the 9th month in the Islamic calendar, a significant holy month in the Islamic faith and a month of sacrifice in which Muslims fast the entirety of the month, abstaining from food and drink from sunrise to sunset; and

WHEREAS, commencement of Ramadan begins on the evening of March 10, 2024, and Ramadan continues for one lunar month; and

WHEREAS, Ramadan is the holy month when millions of Muslims in the United States fast not only to renew themselves spiritually but also to recognize their responsibility and obligations to society at large and to take care of those less fortunate, regardless of their religious or racial background; and

WHEREAS, Muslims in Maine contribute greatly to charitable organizations that help people from all faith backgrounds and have also contributed greatly to society, serving as medical professionals, teachers, first responders, journalists, writers, artists, athletes, small business owners, professors, activists, community leaders and elected public officials; and

WHEREAS, Muslims in Maine have a long history of contributions to our State, including the building of one of the first mosques in North America in Biddeford in 1915; and

WHEREAS, Eid al-Fitr is celebrated by Muslims worldwide as the day that marks the end of the month-long sunrise-to-sunset fasting of Ramadan; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED: That We, the Members of the One Hundred and Thirty-first Legislature now assembled in the Second Regular Session, on behalf of the people we represent, in observance of and out of respect for the commencement of Ramadan, the Muslim holy month of fasting, prayer, charity, reflection and spiritual renewal, take this opportunity to recognize the onset of Ramadan and express our deepest respect to Muslims in Maine and throughout the world on this significant occasion; and be it further

RESOLVED: That We extend best wishes to all those of Muslim faith in Maine, the United States and across the world for a joyous and meaningful observance of Eid al-Fitr.

Comes from the House, **READ** and **ADOPTED**.

The Joint Resolution was **READ**.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from Cumberland, Senator Duson.

Senator **DUSON:** Thank you, Mr. President. I rise to request permission to address the Body on the record.

THE PRESIDENT: So moved.

Senator **DUSON:** Thank you. Mr. President and my Fellow Colleagues of the Senate, I rise to recognize this excellent resolution. I'd like to thank our colleagues in the Other Body, Representative Abdi, Representative Dhalac, Representative Rana, and everyone who signed onto this resolution commemorating the month of Ramadan. It is a time of reflection, a time of renewal and spiritual regeneration. Muslims fast from food and drink during the daylight hours for 28 to 30 days. And yes, not even water. In the sayings of Prophet Muhammad during this month, if you do not refrain from ill speech, bad speech, bad habits, and a negative disposition, God has no use of your refraining of food and drink. Mr. President, we are halfway through this blessed month. I'd like to report that last Friday, I had the distinct privilege and honor to attend the annual iftar breaking of fast meal at the Maine Muslim Community Center located in East Bayside neighborhood in Portland, along with my Honorable Colleague from the Senate -- from Cumberland, Senator Brenner - who, by the way, has an amazing capacity to consume food from a buffet - you wouldn't expect it, but - as well as the Representative from South Portland, Representative Dhalac. We connected with faith leaders, community members, government officials where we joined in breaking the fast together with our Muslim neighbors. We were pleased to be the guest of our legislative aide, Bilal Hussein. A tremendous demonstration of interfaith cooperation, working together in mutual respect and recognition highlighted the evening. An important aspect of the month of Ramadan is the concept of the neighbor. Muslims during the month of Ramadan are required to reach out to their neighbors. This small activity has a profound impact on community building in our communities and underscores the value of putting others before ourselves. Mr. President and Fellow Colleagues, join me in wishing Muslims in Maine and around the world a Ramadan Kareem. I urge us all to embrace the spirit of Ramadan and to deepen our understanding of one another to foster a more inclusive and compassionate society. Let us celebrate the diversity of our communities and strive to

uphold the principles of justice, equality, and peace for all. Wishing everyone an early Eid Mubarak. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from Cumberland, Senator Brenner.

Senator **BRENNER:** Thank you, Mr. President, and Fellow Colleagues of the Senate. I rise today to commemorate the month of Ramadan. I had the honor of joining my Esteemed Colleague from Cumberland, Senator Dusen, to attend the annual iftar, breaking of the fast, at the Maine Muslim Community Center in Portland on Friday, as she mentioned. And I had the chance to connect with leaders from local to federal as well as community from around the Greater Portland area. We also had a chance to learn more about what Ramadan means to Muslims in Maine and across the world. And, as the Senator mentioned, it was all thanks to our aide, Bilal Hussein. The holy Quran teaches Muslims that fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you. Similar to the fasting of Yom Kippur in my Jewish faith, Ramadan is a time for spiritual regeneration and nourishing the soul. Mr. President, Ramadan is an important time for Muslims in Maine and around the world. It is a time of prayer, charity, and a time to pause and consider our role in society. It's a time to acknowledge those less fortunate than ourselves and to recognize our role in helping our communities as much as we can. These tenets of reflection, self-discipline, and charity are values many religions share, and I believe these are values that many of us can strive to live up to in our own communities. Although it is a time of blessing, family, joyfulness, it is important to recognize there are people today that don't have these same liberties. There are places in the world where Muslims are involuntarily fasting due to conflict or because they don't even have access to basic nourishment like bread and water to break their fast with. Ramadan also allows us all to reflect on our everyday decisions and to always choose the best course of action. Mr. President and Fellow Colleagues, it is with this mind that I strongly support today's resolution and with it, extend best wishes to the Muslim community in Maine, the United States, and around the world. Please join me, colleagues, in wishing an early Eid Mubarak for the day of Eid al-Fitr that commemorates the end of Ramadan. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from York, Senator Ingwersen.

Senator **INGWERSEN:** Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, I rise today along with my Fellow Senators to commemorate the month of Ramadan and to highlight the contributions of Muslims in the State of Maine. I'd like to mention a little bit about the clause that talks about Muslims having a long history of contributions to our state, including the building of one of the first mosques in North America in Biddeford in the year 1915. The first group of Muslims arrived in Maine in the early 1900s to work in the mills in Biddeford. According to research at Bar Harbor University, they were recruited from Albania as textile designers, and there was a vibrant Albanian Muslim community. Unfortunately, this Albanian community disappeared as swiftly as they arrived. Historians believe this disappearance had something to do with the Spanish influenza that came to Maine and led to the death of tens of millions of Americans. One of the last remnants remaining of this community of Albanian Muslims is at the Woodlawn Cemetery on West Street in Biddeford. When

visiting this cemetery, it's noticeable that some of the tombstones all face in one direction. The Muslim burials face the direction of mecca, the same direction they face when they pray five times per day. Luckily for us all, the Muslim community is again growing in the Biddeford area, and on this coming Saturday, I will join the community in Biddeford for their second annual iftar or breaking of the fast. I can't wait to see what kind of food it has in store, and I'll definitely be competing with Senator Brenner for some of that food. Mr. President, it's so important to understand the contribution of Muslims in our state. I'm honored to recognize the commencement of Ramadan, and I wish all Muslims in Maine and worldwide an Eid Mubarak. Thank you.

The Joint Resolution was **ADOPTED**, in concurrence.

Out of order and under suspension of the Rules, the Senate considered the following:

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Senate

Divided Report

The Majority of the Committee on **HEALTH COVERAGE, INSURANCE AND FINANCIAL SERVICES** on Bill "An Act to Reduce Prescription Drug Costs by Requiring Reference-based Pricing"
S.P. 745 L.D. 1829

Reported that the same **Ought to Pass as Amended by Committee Amendment "A" (S-613).**

Signed:

Senators:

BAILEY of York
RENY of Lincoln

Representatives:

PERRY of Calais
ARFORD of Brunswick
CLUCHEY of Bowdoinham
MASTRACCIO of Sanford
MATHIESON of Kittery

The Minority of the same Committee on the same subject reported that the same **Ought Not To Pass.**

Signed:

Representatives:

CYRWAY of Albion
MORRIS of Turner
NUTTING of Oakland
SWALLOW of Houlton

Reports **READ.**

Senator **BAILEY** of York moved the Senate **ACCEPT** the Majority **OUGHT TO PASS AS AMENDED** Report.

On further motion by same Senator, supported by a Division of one-fifth of the members present and voting, a Roll Call was ordered.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from Lincoln, Senator Reny.

Senator **RENY:** Thank you, Mr. President. This is a bill that's really near and dear to my heart. We've all heard the phrase if you have your health, you have everything. Health really is everything. I find it personally appalling that in a country as rich as ours, people struggle to have -- to access prescription medication or even afford the meds that they need at all. I became personally invested in drug pricing years ago when somebody I loved dearly got sick, somebody I care about very much there in their senior year of high school and their kidneys stopped working, so they needed a transplant. They needed a lot of medication, even after they got the transplant, they still need a lot of medication. And those medications that you have to have just to keep the organ in your body working can cost thousands of dollars every month. Okay? So, this person that does not come from a rich family, who was just starting out their life, kind of -- they have to have -- make the choice between staying poor enough to qualify for help from the government or getting rich really quick in order to afford the meds they need to just live. My concern about this issues hasn't lessened as time has gone on. As a school counselor for several years, I've worked with numerous families where they can't afford the meds they desperately need. There were kids that were coming to school without the medications that they need to be successful because their parents couldn't afford it, there were parents who had significant mental health issues that they needed meds for that they couldn't afford because, as I'm sure everyone here is aware, there is a large amount of people who just aren't poor enough to qualify for help from the State but aren't rich enough to be able to afford some of the necessities that they really need to be able to live their best lives. So, there's countless stories like these, and if you have not had a significant illness or drug costs -- well, good for you, you're a very lucky person. My search for solutions to this issue brought me to this bill. So, in Maine, we have a prescription drug affordability board, or a PDAB, and that started meeting just in 2020, and it had a focus on finding a way to lower prescription prices for public programs. So, in other states, PDABs have been given more authority and resources to study the supply chain in order to understand the drivers of high drug prices and make effective policy recommendations, including but not limited to leveraging the work of the federal government in their Medicare drug price negotiations. So, our PDAB needs financial support and staffing to do a number of things. As I'm sure, you know, the healthcare system is a beast, and drug pricing is a very complicated - I think by design - issue. They need to crunch numbers and analyze other states' work; they need to make sure that we're within legal limits. Remember, this work puts them against giant pharmaceutical companies. There's very complex pricing, there's private and public programs, there's supply chain issues, even rebates provide a lot of complicated situations that we need to work through. So, this bill, to me, it's an investment that will save Mainers a ton of money in the future on medications they have to have to live their best lives. And I

think they deserve it, so I'm asking you to please vote Ought to Pass today. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from Androscoggin, Senator Brakey.

Senator **BRAKEY:** Thank you, Mr. President. I rise in opposition to the pending motion, though with much -- much respect for my colleague from Lincoln County, who I think her heart is very much in the right place, I think that we all recognize that we have a very broken healthcare system, the pharmaceutical system itself is very broken in so many ways. But this is not the right solution. What we're talking about here in this bill is moving towards price controls. Not just price controls in terms of the government sector, in terms of, you know, Medicare/Medicaid kind of establishing, you know, what we're paying for those programs, but price controls in the private sector, price controls in terms of what private companies can pay for certain -- for certain pharmaceuticals. And, you know, I think this is one of the most well-studied issues in economics, price controls, which, you know, shortages follow price controls as surely as night follows day. When you set an artificial price cap, it disincentivizes production and bringing things to market. And there are certainly many other ways we could tackle these problems. You know, we could be looking at on the federal level there's certainly abuse of intellectual property law and patent law where companies extend patents artificially through different means in order to maintain monopolies over these products longer than they otherwise would. That's something that could be tackled. I also appreciate work that's been done -- I think, Mr. President, you've led on legislation around being able to import pharmaceuticals from Canada at lower prices. There are things we could do to work for lower prices here, but price controls I don't think are the way. You know, when I look at our healthcare sector, I think so much oftentimes of all the layers upon layers upon layers of supposed solutions that we put in place, layers of government bureaucracy, layers of government laws that have simply made things more expensive and more unaffordable for the average person. I always think back to the nursery rhyme I learned in kindergarten about the old lady who swallowed the fly. Why, oh, why, did she swallow the fly? We don't why, we think she'll die. For those who don't know this nursery rhyme, it's about an old lady, she swallows a fly, she's got a problem, so what does she do? She fixes that problem by swallowing a spider. Well, she fixed the fly problem, but now she's got a spider problem. So, then she swallows a bird, and then a cat, and then a dog, and by the end of it, she's swallowing a cow, and then she dies. Right? Every problem she had, she came up with a solution that fixed that problem but came with problems even worse than what we began. And so, rather than layering price controls on top of this already highly broken system - broken through almost a century of failed government policies intervening in this marketplace - I believe we should be, instead, looking how do we unravel a lot of these failed layers of government bureaucracy. This would take us in the wrong direction. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from York, Senator Bailey.

Senator **BAILEY:** Thank you, Mr. President, Men and Women of the Senate. I just wanted to rise and address some of the comments from the Good Senator from Androscoggin in regards

to price controls and what this PDAB will and will not do. And I would just urge you all to actually look at the bill and what the board has for powers and duties. And so, what the board is empowered to do is first, review prescription drug spending and utilization data to identify causes of high spending or rising spending affecting public and private payers and impacting consumers. Next, solicit public input to identify cost-related barriers to accessing prescription drugs. Next, assess strategies to reduce the cost of prescription drugs and reduce the rate of growth in prescription drug spending, and to reduce cost barriers for consumers. The review of strategies must include consideration of the strategy's likely impact on consumers and overall healthcare costs and the feasibility of implementing such strategies. And then it gives a minimum things that the board is to look at. Next, the board is empowered to look at other states' experiences in terms of reducing prescription drugs, and then one of the powers and duties that the board may consider and may implement are upper payment limits. So, there's nothing in there about price controls other than it may be something that the board looks at. Thank you, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: The pending question before the Senate is Acceptance of the Majority Ought to Pass as Amended Report. A roll call has been ordered. Is the Senate ready for the question?

The Doorkeepers secured the Chamber.

The Secretary opened the vote.

ROLL CALL (#625)

YEAS: Senators: BAILEY, BALDACCI, BEEBE-CENTER, BRENNER, CARNEY, CHIPMAN, CURRY, DAUGHTRY, DUSON, GROHOSKI, HICKMAN, INGWERSEN, LAFOUNTAIN, LAWRENCE, NANGLE, PIERCE, RAFFERTY, RENY, ROTUNDO, TIPPING, VITELLI, PRESIDENT JACKSON

NAYS: Senators: BENNETT, BLACK, BRAKEY, FARRIN, GUERIN, HARRINGTON, KEIM, LIBBY, LYFORD, MOORE, POULIOT, STEWART, TIMBERLAKE

22 Senators having voted in the affirmative and 13 Senators having voted in the negative, the motion by Senator **BAILEY** of York to **ACCEPT** the Majority **OUGHT TO PASS AS AMENDED** Report **PREVAILED**.

Bill READ ONCE.

Committee Amendment "A" (S-613) **READ** and **ADOPTED**.

Under suspension of the Rules, **READ A SECOND TIME** and **PASSED TO BE ENGROSSED AS AMENDED**.

Sent down for concurrence.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Unfinished Business

The following matters in the consideration of which the Senate was engaged at the time of Adjournment had preference in the Orders of the Day and continued with such preference until disposed of as provided by Senate Rule 516.

The Chair laid before the Senate the following Tabled and Later Assigned (6/22/23) matter:

SENATE REPORTS - from the Committee on **LABOR AND HOUSING** on Bill "An Act to Address Unsafe Staffing of Nurses and Improve Patient Care" S.P. 656 L.D. 1639

Majority - **Ought to Pass as Amended by Committee Amendment "A" (S-391)** (7 members)

Minority - **Ought Not to Pass** (3 members)

Tabled - June 22, 2023 by Senator **TIPPING** of Penobscot

Pending - **ACCEPTANCE OF EITHER REPORT**

(**CARRIED OVER**, pursuant to Joint Order SP 847.)

(In Senate, March 25, 2024, Reports **READ**.)

Senator **TIPPING** of Penobscot moved the Senate **ACCEPT** the Majority **OUGHT TO PASS AS AMENDED** Report.

On further motion by same Senator, supported by a Division of one-fifth of the members present and voting, a Roll Call was ordered.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from Washington, Senator Moore.

Senator **MOORE:** Thank you, Mr. President. I rise today in opposition to the pending motion. As a member of the Health and Human Services Committee, I hear every day how fragile our healthcare system is. The legislation before us has the potential to bring it crashing down and further limit access to care, especially in our rural areas. LD 1639 imposes arbitrary nurse to patient ratio requirements for every patient care unit in Maine hospitals, and it treats all hospitals the same, from my hospitals in Calais and Machias to Maine Medical Center in Portland. The only two hospitals it treats differently are Riverview and Dorothea Dix, which are exempted from the bill. Let me pause there. If this policy isn't appropriate for our two state-run hospitals, why is it appropriate for our private, nonprofit hospitals? The bill also establishes a fine of \$10,000 per unit per shift when hospitals are unable to comply with the mandated ratios, and they will violate the mandate because patient volumes and staffing changes quickly in hospitals - minute by minute, hour by hour, shift by shift. For example, if a critical access hospital has a nurse or two call out sick and the hospital is unable to backfill their positions immediately, the

hospital could be fined \$10,000. Or if a hospital unit has two patients ready for discharge and a third in the ED in desperate need of inpatient care, the third will either have to languish in the ED until one patient is discharged or the hospital will be fined \$10,000. These fines will be imposed at a time when 68% of hospitals in Maine are operating with a negative operating margin and hospitals lost \$200 million last year. Individual nurses face fines up to \$25,000 if they are found to have violated the rules. That's right, it's not just the hospital that gets fined, but the nurses and other medical professionals face fines of \$25,000 in proposed Section 1803 Part 2 on page ten, if they violate a rule. This is extreme. Proponents of this legislation claim that we have 12,000 nurses sitting on the sidelines waiting for government mandated ratios to return to the bedside. On your desk, you have information from the Maine Board of Nursing which shows that just 3% of nurses in Maine are unemployed and seeking work as a nurse. Nurses in Maine are at full employment. This bill will not create one single new nurse. Instead, it will force hospitals to make the difficult decision to further rely on expensive temporary staffing agencies and go into deeper financial ruin or reduced services and closed beds - something that we've already seen in our rural communities. I can assure you that many Maine hospitals will be forced to close beds and services as they can ill afford to add to their already bright red bottom lines. Like you, I have heard from many constituents on this bill, and many of them are patients. They are terrified that this bill will limit access to care more than it already is in my district. And of course, I've heard from nurses, too. They have fought hard to practice at the top of their license and this bill reduces them to a number and strips them of their autonomy and their ability to do their jobs. Who is to say that the Legislature is better equipped to determine how many patients a nurse can care for? That should be left to the nurses and professional societies that govern the work that they do. The other side will say this is fearmongering, but the Labor and Housing Committee received testimony from Maine nurses who previously worked in Massachusetts and had government mandated ratios in intensive care units. One nurse testified about having to refuse a newborn baby in the NICU because they were at ratio caps. The baby had to be sent two hours away from the mother who had just given birth, even though the nurses knew that they were able to safely care for the baby in the same hospital as the mother. California passed mandated nurse staffing ratios almost 25 years ago, and the nurses in California marched on the Capitol last year, demanding legislators address the shortage of almost 19,000 full-time nurses, short staffing in hospitals, and complaints of unsafe caseloads. This is clearly a failed policy, so why should we follow California's lead? This bill represents government overreach to the extreme. Do we regulate businesses to ensure they provide safe working conditions? Absolutely. And hospitals are heavily regulated today, including on safe staffing. In fact, Maine hospitals received some of the highest scores in the country on quality and safety indicators. This bill is a dangerous solution to nurse burnout. Maine has rejected mandated ratios multiple times over the years, and I hope that you will join me today in saying once again that rigid government mandated ratios are not right for Maine nurses or their patients. And when I look at the behavioral health portion of this bill, this bill exempts Riverview and Dorothea Dix, but does apply to Spring Harbor and Acadia, and the seven community hospitals that provide inpatient psychiatric services - Maine Medical Center, Pen Bay Medical, Northern Maine Medical Center, St. Mary's, Maine General, and Midcoast. This bill would

mandate that a nurse be assigned to four psychiatric patients at all times, even at night. This is not clinically appropriate and not a good use of scarce resources. Inpatient psychiatric units utilize a team-based model of care, which is a combination of your LCSWs, your psych techs, your nurses, your physicians, etcetera, and use less staffing at night because most of their patients are sleeping and require just simple observation. Unlike medical patients, psychiatric patients are often not woken up at night to administer medications. Spring Harbor Hospital alone would need to hire 45 nurses at an estimated cost of almost \$4.5 million to comply with this mandate. They would likely need to rely on traveling nurses, which could easily double the cost to \$9 million. Northern Light Acadia Hospital just completed a hospital expansion project that will increase the availability of inpatient psychiatric care, and this bill threatens their ability to hire nurses to staff the new patient care units. They, too, will have to turn to the predatory pricing practices of traveler nurse agencies for nursing staff. The alternative is a psychiatric hospital with the beds so desperately needed in our state that are unstaffed and closed to patient care. Our behavioral health system is in financial distress. This bill will only make it worse at a time when 861 children languished on average for seven to ten days in the emergency departments across the state in 2022, waiting for access to the level of care they need. Thank you, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from Cumberland, Senator Brenner.

Senator **BRENNER:** Thank you, Mr. President, and Colleagues of the Senate. I suspect you are all happy to see we're taking up unfinished 1. I rise in strong support of LD 1639. I want to start by telling you a piece of my own personal story. I went to nursing school and received both my Bachelor's and my Master's as a single mom. I'm not unique in the world of nursing. The caregiving professions are full of people just like me who lean into commitment of caring for others through dedication and hard work. Eighty-eight percent of nurses in the United States are female. In my short time here in the Legislature, there are few bills that I can relate to more personally than this one. I can remember with clarity the feeling of walking out of the hospital after a 14-hour shift with a deep and pervasive sense of dread that I'd forgotten to chart something about one of my patients. I remember shifts on the floor when my bladder was so full but there was way too much to do, and my needs felt secondary to the call bells ringing. Mr. President, I can tell you with humility that being in the Legislature is like a relaxing hobby in comparison to working as a bedside nurse. The fear of near-misses and possibly devastating errors from working over capacity as a bedside nurse builds a sense of moral injury one shift at a time. Somehow, I failed to tell this reality to my own daughter. I did not communicate the deep and profound challenge of what it means to be a nurse. I encouraged her to sign up for nursing school, and I only shared the part of the story that matters. I only shared the message with her about the true joy and satisfaction that I felt about my work as a nurse. As a friend of mine once said, the work is both beautiful and relentless. The bill in front of you today accomplishes two primary goals; increasing patient safety and encouraging nurse retention. Not all of us are going to practice as nurses, but at some point in life, we're either going to be a patient or we're going to be the loved one of a patient that care and touch of a nurse in the time when you are most vulnerable increases patient satisfaction, dignity, and the overall perception

of a patient and family's hospital experience. This is a bill for everyone, but most especially, this is a bill for bedside nurses. The opposition will tell you that hospitals will close, go broke, never find enough nurses to fill necessary positions. They will talk about traveling nurses, they will ask for studies, and they will say we are working really, really hard to achieve quality care goals. However, evidence shows that nurse recruitment and retention rates increase with staffing ratios. Nationally, there are a million licensed nurses who aren't working in nursing. Maine has approximately 28,000 nurses and they're not all working in the field. Maine ranks higher than the national average in the number of licensed nurses per capita and higher than both California and Oregon, where ratios are already in place. Maine does not have a shortage of nurses; we have workplace conditions that are unacceptable to nurses. In previous legislative sessions and in other states when this policy proposal has come up, the cry has always been to increase nurse education efforts. You'll be pleased, Mr. President, as pleased as I was, to learn that these efforts have paid off nationally. We've created a continuous fresh pipeline of new graduates, but hospitals are churning right through them. I can't imagine that this was the intended outcome when the Legislature chose to fund nursing education. This is just simply not about getting enough nurses to accomplish the work, Mr. President. It's about, as I said before, working conditions where nurses are not able to deliver quality care. So, let's just talk about for a second what happens when you have too many patients to care for. Moral distress. When RNs make medication errors because of exhaustion, when they become liable for mistakes and malpractice and when RNs don't have the tools they need to give safe care, it causes moral distress. Med errors, for example, are an easy and grave mistake to make. Systems and technology are in place to minimize those mistakes, but those fixes are no substitute for an attentive nurse. The right med, right dose, right route, right patient, that's the mantra for every nurse every time she gives a medication. And if you get it right but you forget to record the activity because you're too busy, you forget to put it in the medical record, if you're challenged in a malpractice suit, your word doesn't matter because if you didn't write it down, you didn't do it, and you're liable for the error, not the hospital. Nurses have lost their licenses for making mistakes that happen when they had too many patients to care for on a shift. Humans get tired. All of the nurses I know are up for the task, but when mental exhaustion is compounded by the moral quandaries of did I miss something today? Did the next shift nurse get good notes from me? Could we have done more to save this patient? That is when we enter the territory of moral injury and stress. Mr. President, these are not grouchy workers in a bad career. These are dedicated caregivers. And as a nurse myself, it's in our DNA to care and to comfort and - to use a word often heard in these halls - to serve. Nurses who push onward in unsafe nurse-patient ratios on a daily basis do suffer. These are veterans, they're tough as any military vet, and they will not let their patients see their suffering. But as hospitals build slick new wings, administrator's pay skyrockets, and the gender pay gap remains stubbornly lodged in an earlier era, this is not a labor model with a future. My daughter and her nursing friends are the future of care in Maine, and they will not sacrifice themselves. Will they serve? Absolutely. How convenient to continually target a nursing shortage as a reason for staffing issues rather than admit that you might need to adjust the workplace conditions to retain new graduate nurses who enter your facility. If we can't find enough nurses in the current

conditions, let's change those conditions so nurses will come back to the bedside. And then what about the patients? What about patient outcomes? There's compelling data about the effectiveness of nurse-patient ratios. Thirty-plus years of research show patient outcome data revealing shorter hospital stays, lower infection rates. Studies show that when registered nurses are forced to care for too many patients at one time, there are medical errors, complications, falls and injuries, pressure sores, increased lengths of stay, readmissions, and death. Studies prove this, but nurses know it. Nurses experience moral distress because of it. They know the way to provide safe and effective care to our patients is to mandate minimum safe staffing levels through this legislation. Many nurses are not going to share their story in front of management in a public hearing, but they have come forward to ask for the Legislature's help because they have nowhere else to turn. Mr. President, nurses are the most trusted profession in the country. All of us will experience the care of a nurse in the coming years. They are both the face of healthcare for the patient and the eyes and the ears for doctors. So, when you are next in the hospital and you wake up from surgery and your nurse is there to reassure you, and when your nurse is there to fill you in on how the night went for your loved one in the ICU, and when your wife finally feels like she needs to push after a long labor and your nurse shows up and says let's do this, I can't wait to meet this baby, and your 89-year-old father-in-law rings your nurse because he finally has to have a bowel movement and he needs help getting to the commode so he can preserve his dignity, and when your nurse is there to tell you that she's so sorry for your loss or when she doesn't come at all when you ring the bell because she's really busy down the hall with all the other patients. I just want you to reflect for a minute, Mr. President, on how many times your nurse has reached into the deep well of her heart for you and your family. And then I want you to remember how many times she did that that day, that month, that week, for all of Mainers. This is a bill for the bedside nurses. I urge you to support the pending motion. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from Penobscot, Senator Baldacci.

Senator **BALDACCI:** Thank you, Mr. President. I would first of all acknowledge the heartfelt remarks of the Senator from Cumberland. I think they were very articulate and well said. I think all of us agree that there is a problem, that there's patients who are not getting adequately staffed, there are hospitals that have workforce shortages, but is a workforce shortage more the problem more than a hospital problem? I want to share with you a letter I received from both Northern Light Hospital, which is in Bangor, and St. Joseph's Hospital, which is also in Bangor, and -- and between them employ thousands of people in various forms of healthcare.

The letter is sent to you from two hospitals that support the Greater Bangor region and the upper two-thirds of the State of Maine. Many of our patients drive hours to receive care with both our organizations -- within both of our organizations' walls. Providing access in this region and maintaining these services is critically important. We have joined together to let you know in clear terms what this bill would do for the State of Maine and, more specifically, Greater Bangor. So, after the California law, ratio law took place, for many years, ambulances continued to experience significant wait times to transfer patients of the hospital emergency rooms, they cannot transfer care responsibly,

they cannot transfer care responsibility until the staffing law requirements are met. Both St. Joseph's Hospital and Northern Light EMMC regularly accept patient transfers from outlying hospitals all over eastern, northern, and central Maine. Our adult units will be forced to close a third of our beds in order to maintain compliance with this bill. With this mandate, our hospitals will struggle to support the patients within our walls, leaving patients in need of community and tertiary care at critical access hospitals. We do not have the capacity to bring in the level of staffing required by this mandate to mitigate this impact from both a workforce and a financial perspective. Advocates have stated that there are nurses within the state who would come back to the bedside should this bill pass, but this claim is simply not backed up by the facts. Maine hospitals, educational organizations, the Maine State Board of Nursing have tracked for many years where nurses are and what they are doing. Workforce data collected by the State Board of Nursing shows that 88% of the Maine active RN workforce were actively employed in nursing and only 12% were reported not working. Half of this 12% reported they were retired. Only 3% of Maine's active RNs were unemployed, but stated the top reason was taking care of home and family. Even if all 3% determine that they would return to the bedside and no longer remain home taking care of their family, the number would still be short of what is needed. Our data shows that in 2025 -- that in 2025, we will be experiencing a shortfall of more than 2,250 nurses prior to the mandate. This is where our focus should be, building our future workforce.

There's many other things, but the bottom line is that if this was the right solution, it would've been implemented many, many years ago, after California adopted it. But I would share with this Body that California did not adopt the ratio bill at first. They adopted a bill to have the state and other group of stakeholders determine clinically what is the best patient staff ratios and in what settings. That is really what our next step should be is making that -- those determinations on a statewide basis, but imposing strict limits and punitive fines and thinking that this is going to solve the problem is unfortunately going to be a recipe for disaster in healthcare in eastern, northern, and all over the state.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from Penobscot, Senator Tipping.

Senator **TIPPING:** Thank you, Mr. President. We've heard today and we've heard a lot over the last year, I think, all of us, many difficult and conflicting and sometimes confusing arguments about this bill. Those of us on the Labor Committee, maybe for a few months more than others. We've also heard a great deal about ancillary but related issues around reimbursement rates, travel nurses, nursing education, and other issues. In all of this, what has been most convincing to me and why I support this legislation was hearing from nurse after nurse from hospitals across Maine talking about burnout, injury, mental and emotional damage, about dangerously substandard care in Maine hospitals, and too many nurses leaving hospitals and leaving their profession. I believe that hospital administrators are doing good work and that their concerns are real, and I'll note that some Maine hospitals are already meeting these ratios, including St. Joe's, like my colleague from Penobscot County mentioned. But their focus is day to day and shift by shift and keeping their hospital going. It is the role of this Body to consider the broader picture, the longer term and the health of our state. It's clear that the status quo right

now is a disaster and it's getting worse, and we can't continue like this. Now, the committee did some important work on this bill that I'm very proud of. We attempted to assess the seriousness of these concerns. We amended the legislation to provide waivers for direct care in critical access hospitals, exactly the concerns that my colleague from Washington County mentioned, and we delayed the penalty implementations so that we can get a clear picture of the ratio's effects in practice and do exactly the kind of judgment that has been noted that we should be doing. But I want to push back immediately against the contention that this won't have more nurses come into hospitals. In fact, there are almost twice as many licensed nurses in the state right now that are working as nurses. In 2022, the gap was 12,443 nurses that aren't working in their field. And we've heard from hospital administrators that pressure from this bill, quote, "Has already led to more flexible staffing and increased pay." Even just putting this out there has caused action. So, there obviously is more that can be done. Now, we can take other actions as the Legislature to support hospitals, to support healthcare, but what we can't do is allow the downward spiral to continue that's happening right now. It's dangerous for patients, it's devastating for nurses, and it's awful for the future of our state, our healthcare, and the people of Maine. I urge my colleagues to support the Maine Quality Care Act. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from Androscoggin, Senator Brakey.

Senator **BRAKEY:** Thank you, Mr. President. I'm certain that nobody in this body contests that we do have problems, and we certainly have a nursing shortage in our state. But sometimes, it seems to me that we in government overestimate our own ability to mandate things into existence. We're going to pass a law, we're going to pass a mandate, and we're going to say things are going to get better because we issued a decree. When really, what we're doing is issuing a top-down solution to a bottom-up problem, a problem that exists in the -- with a variety of factors contributing to this, and we're coming in with this top-down mandate and saying somehow issuing this decree is going to fix it. But there are a lot of contributing factors to the nursing shortage that we have in the state. Certainly, it's not a new problem, it's a problem we've had, certainly, I remember the days that I chaired the Health and Human Services Committee a half decade ago, we were dealing with workforce shortages in healthcare, though certainly not to the degree that we have today. What are things that we could do? Well, personally, I wish I had a time machine and that we could go back and not fire arbitrarily 5-10% of the nursing -- the nurses in this state over the COVID vaccine mandate that has thankfully been lifted, but it turns out that a lot of nurses after being arbitrarily fired and spending a year-plus out of work, go on to find jobs other places and a lot of them have not come back to these positions. Sadly, we can't go backward and fix that, we can only go forward. Other things we could explore if it's -- if it's problems that consumers of healthcare aren't getting the services that they need and the workforce is not being adequately -- not having the conditions that we would like to see, you know, other proposals that have come before in this body like repealing certificate of need laws and restoring market forces and competition back into healthcare. That certainly is something that could help. But that's not what's on the table. Instead of dealing with these underlying problems and trying to help the system heal itself, we're going to come in with a very top-

down solution that's -- we're not going to mandate our way out of this problem. Thank you, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from Androscoggin, Senator Timberlake.

Senator **TIMBERLAKE:** Thank you, Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Senate. I'm going to present you with some scientific facts. I am probably one of the most healthy people in this body because I get to spend more time at the hospital than probably the rest of you combined. And my scientific facts are that every five weeks, I go and lay my arms out and let these lovely nurses stick needles in my arms and give me my infusions. And every one of them that do that in my office are all nurses, they're not told by management, they don't dare, I get to spend three and a half hours with them when I'm there, and every single one of them have told me do not support this bill. And that's my scientific data. I wasn't lobbied in the hall by a lobbyist, I wasn't told by anybody else, I was told by the people that were sticking the needle in my arm. And I've got to back to them on April 24th and have the needles put back in my arm again, and I thank them for that because it keeps me the ability to make you guys have to listen to me. But I'm going to listen to what they say because they're scared to death, if this bill passes, they won't be able to stay in the departments they're in, they're going to be shuffled around, and things are going to happen in the industry that they're not going to like. So, for that reason, I won't be supporting this bill because the ladies that take care of me every five weeks have asked me not to, and I'm going to honor them. Thank you, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from Oxford, Senator Keim.

Senator **KEIM:** Thank you, Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Senate. I can't let this moment go by without talking about workforce conditions that are unacceptable. And absolutely, there is a problem in hospitals, in healthcare, right, there's shortages. I hear about these shortages almost daily. My daughter is a nurse, and I know that things are tough. This is definitely not a solution. And one of the biggest issues that we have lost nurses is because of the COVID vaccine mandate. We lost any number of nurses for that reason. And yes, some did come back. But a lot of them felt so mistreated and so just unvalued for the work that they do and the people that they are that they have found other things to do. And so, we are coming in now with, as the Senator from Androscoggin said, a top-down approach to try to force a solution that is not a solution. This is going to hurt people, this is going to hurt rural hospitals more, which I represent, and I'm not here on behalf of Maine Health or the Department of Health and Human Services, because I think they're part of the problem. I don't think they value these nurses, as could be seen very clearly during the pandemic. When they're useful, they're there, and then when they aren't following your exact orders, you give them the boot. But I'm here because I know that the people of rural Maine will be hurt by this bill, and the care that they need will be impacted in ways that we can't -- we can't fix right here in this Body. There are systemic changes that need to happen. We need to value them. We need to value people for their independent thought and allow them to be serving Maine people according to the dictates of maybe their religion and what they believe as people and to do that honorably and do that

well. And when we kick those kinds of people out of our health field completely and then we come in with some sort of top-down fix that we think is going to improve matters, it's not, it's going to make them worse. There's a lot wrong here, but this is not a solution, it's another problem.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from Penobscot, Senator Guerin.

Senator **GUERIN:** Thank you, Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Senate. I stand for the health and safety of the people in the Great North Woods and for the safety of patients in many of our rural areas. CA Dean Hospital in Greenville recently had a grand opening of their new facility that is beautiful, state-of-the-art care for people that are far from the Bangor hospitals. And at -- they had a lovely reception afterwards, and knowing that this question was coming before us, I sought out nurses at the reception to ask them their opinions about the bill. And without exception, every one of them was opposed to it and said they were fearful that there wouldn't be staffing levels high enough to utilize the beautiful new facility and equipment that has been placed there in Greenville. And it's a long drive to Bangor from Greenville. If you're in the emergency room in Greenville from a snowmobiling accident, it could be a case of life and death whether you were able to be seen in Greenville with a caring staff that is willing to go the extra mile to help their patients. And I think we just need to look at the damage it could do to patient care in all of our rural hospitals. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from Cumberland, Senator Daughtry.

Senator **DAUGHTRY:** Thank you, Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Senate. I rise in strong support of the pending motion before us. And I rise not as a nurse, but as a sister, friend, and family member of some of the most inspiring and phenomenal nurses. One thing I think we can agree on even though we're on different sides of the issue is I've heard almost everyone today say that our healthcare system is broken. And let me be clear that because it's broken is why we're having this discussion here today. We've heard several figures thrown out about all the differences in the active licensed nurses that we have not only in the state but also in the nation, and one thing that really is resonating with me is if you look at the number of active licenses -- now, this is pulled from not only the national nurses but from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, which you can also find online. In 2022, we had 28,803 RN licenses, yet only 16,360 employed RNs. If you do the math, that's a difference of 12,443 licenses. Now, keep in mind, that's not a retirement, that's someone who's taking the time to ensure that their license is active. That is 12,443 nurses who are not at the bedside, who are not in our clinics, who are not in our hospitals, who have left a profession that they love and wanted to be there to make a difference but have had whether it's moral injury, whether it's burnout or other circumstances, they have left the profession. For me, I want to be clear that all who work in healthcare are heroes, from nurses to doctors to hospital staff, especially to our janitorial staff, at all different levels. The one thing that is clear is that our nurses are scared. And we've heard a lot of things going on today about this bill will cause the sky to fall, we're doing enough, we're not solving, you know, all the different solutions. There's no piece of legislation that comes before us that is a one-size-fits-all,

magically fix the world. And when I think about what our healthcare system is going through, specifically with nursing, this Body has actually taken a lot of actions over the last ten years to help create more nurses. We've looked at how to make sure that those who are working in healthcare have access to affordable loans and loan repayment, and we've worked hard to increase our availability within our incredible education system as well as our private education system to have amazing pathways to get people trained and into our nursing field. And those programs are filled. I've toured them across the state, I've had bills trying to increase the amount of nurses who are able to get their license and work in hospitals. What scares me and what resonates with me is when those folks hit the bedside, watching the hope and excitement starts to drain as they realize how short-staffed they are. I can't even imagine knowing how stressful our job is here, hearing the Good Senator from Gorham talk about how this feels like a relaxing day in the park compared to her work as a nurse. Also, one thing that really, really sticks with me is a lot of studies nationwide about how understaffing of not only nurses but also for doctors and general response staff have been leading to increased fatal outcomes for patients in our healthcare system. And one thing we know, whether it's schools or healthcare or frankly even the Legislature, when you have a lower ratio of people who are working together, you have better outcomes. It's true in our classrooms, it's true here with our aides, and it's true especially with nurses. We're all humans, we all have flaws, we're all busy, and the better rates you have with our patients of people making sure that they are not having to look at hundreds of patients in a day and that they can focus on those who need the highest levels of care, it is proven time and time again to have the best outcomes for our patients, especially, and but also for our nurses. And I want everyone to think about, you know, a nurse in their life and think about what we can do to make their lives better. Maybe this bill is not the cure-all, but I think it's a good step for showing that we stand with nurses, that we want to make sure that they have the best outcomes possible, and that our patients have the best outcomes as possible. And I also want to urge everyone to continue supporting all of the bills that we have to deal with nursing and make sure that we're filling that field and giving them all the support that they need. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from Kennebec, Senator Pouliot.

Senator **POULIOT:** Thank you, Mr. President. I just want to rise to correct the record. The Good Senator mentioned that there's 12,000 nurses floating around that could be in the workforce that aren't. This letter is actually dated June 7, 2023, it comes from the Office of the Governor.

This letter is to provide information on BON nursing workforce data which is vastly different from testimony provided at the public session and work session on LD 1639, specifically information referenced to be provided by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics that Maine has more RNs than ever and the difference between the number of employed RNs and active RN licenses in Maine is more than 12,000 RNs. While the number of working RNs has indeed increased slightly over the past several years, Board of Nursing workforce minimum data set does not support there being 12,000 active RNs in Maine not working. The BON workforce minimum data set is collected upon licensure application, minimum workforce data set's questions are part of the application required to be completed prior to submitting an

online application. Workforce data collected by the Board of Nursing for 21/22 showed that 88% of Maine's active RN workforce were actively employed in nursing and 12% of inactive RN workforce reported they were not working in nursing. Data on RNs not working show that 6% of RNs in Maine with active licenses reported that they were retired. Only 3% of Maine's active RNs were unemployed, with the top reason being that they wanted to take care of their home and family. I think it's a novel reason and a good reason to stay home. Three percent of the total number of Maine's RNs, 27,767 in 2021, that would approximately be 833 RNs, Mr. President. Three percent of the total, 864 RNs. So, while the Board of Nursing takes no position on this bill, it's important to clarify the minimum workforce data set collected by the board is an accurate depiction of the active RN workforce in Maine. Three percent of unemployment of the total active workforce is nowhere near the 12,000 that's being purported. Thank you, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: The pending question before the Senate is Acceptance of the Majority Ought to Pass as Amended Report. A roll call has been ordered. Is the Senate ready for the question?

The Doorkeepers secured the Chamber.

The Secretary opened the vote.

ROLL CALL (#626)

YEAS: Senators: BAILEY, BEEBE-CENTER, BRENNER, CARNEY, CHIPMAN, CURRY, DAUGHTRY, DUSON, GROHOSKI, HICKMAN, INGWERSEN, LAFOUNTAIN, LAWRENCE, LIBBY, NANGLE, PIERCE, RAFFERTY, RENY, ROTUNDO, TIPPING, VITELLI, PRESIDENT JACKSON

NAYS: Senators: BALDACCI, BENNETT, BLACK, BRAKEY, FARRIN, GUERIN, HARRINGTON, KEIM, LYFORD, MOORE, POULIOT, STEWART, TIMBERLAKE

22 Senators having voted in the affirmative and 13 Senators having voted in the negative, the motion by Senator **TIPPING** of Penobscot to **ACCEPT** the Majority **OUGHT TO PASS AS AMENDED** Report, **PREVAILED**.

Bill READ ONCE.

Committee Amendment "A" (S-391) **READ** and **ADOPTED**.

Under suspension of the Rules, **READ A SECOND TIME** and **PASSED TO BE ENGROSSED AS AMENDED**.

Sent down for concurrence.

All matters thus acted upon were ordered sent down forthwith for concurrence.

The Chair laid before the Senate the following Tabled and Later Assigned (6/22/23) matter:

HOUSE REPORTS - from the Committee on **CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY** on Bill "An Act to Establish a Minimum Value Threshold for the Class C Crime of Theft by a Repeat Offender"
H.P. 1442 L.D. 2246

Majority - **Ought to Pass as Amended by Committee Amendment "A" (H-846)** (6 members)

Minority - **Ought Not to Pass** (5 members)

Tabled - March 26, 2024 by Senator **HARRINGTON** of York

Pending - motion by Senator **BEEBE-CENTER** of Knox to **ACCEPT** the Majority **OUGHT TO PASS AS AMENDED** Report in concurrence (Roll Call Ordered)

(In House, March 25, 2024, the Majority **OUGHT TO PASS AS AMENDED** Report **READ** and **ACCEPTED** and the Bill **PASSED TO BE ENGROSSED AS AMENDED BY COMMITTEE AMENDMENT "A" (H-846)**.)

(In Senate, March 26, 2024, Reports **READ**.)

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from York, Senator Harrington.

Senator **HARRINGTON:** Thank you, Mr. President. I rise in opposition to the pending motion. I think it's important to note that we have tried this before in the early 2000s. We actually reversed the decision that was put forward because of the rise in crime. I think, you know, a lot of people are using an emotional argument such as, you know, someone steals a box of diapers, perhaps. You will be hard pressed to find a single case in this state where anyone was prosecuted and convicted of stealing something that de minimis. But there does come a point where if you steal multiple items on multiple occasions, there should be a consequence, and this is where, you know, we get into organized crime rings that are very prevalent in the State of Maine. They start in Kittery and they work their way up, moving through Freeport, and they go and they're just organized theft, you know, they steal small items - sunglasses, clothing items - and these are all items under that \$500 threshold that is put forward in this bill. So, when people say, you know, they use very small amounts, let's keep in mind that this is up to \$500, you can steal items up to \$500 indefinitely for the rest of your life and it will never reach a felony if this passes, which is why the Retail Association of Maine has come out against this. This will be detrimental to our stores. We're already experiencing high rates of theft, but without this deterrent, these out-of-state crime rings will -- will come into Maine even more. So, I've looked at the prosecutorial and judicial discretion, I've talked to prosecutors, I've talked to a judge. They already have the right to not prosecute or adjudicate a de minimis case. As I said, you will not find a single case that has been used as an example of something very small, but there should come a time where people are held accountable. So, I would urge you to vote against this motion for the retail businesses in your district, I assure you, if you reach out to the retailers in your district, they will not support this, and if you talk to the criminal investigators

within your district, they too will not support removing this provision of law. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from Knox, Senator Beebe-Center.

Senator **BEEBE-CENTER:** Thank you, Mr. President. I urge that we support this. Ladies and Gentlemen of the Senate, I want to clarify that this bill is not meant to advocate for theft, or to say in any way that stealing is encouraged. However, a felony charge carries a lot of weight, more than many of us realize, and has life-long consequences. These consequences include restrictions on Second Amendment rights, loss of Social Security benefits, travel restrictions, and restrictions in problem security housing, as well as employment. I understand that there needs to be consequences for a conviction, but I believe that the punishment needs to fit the crime. This bill would allow for a more suitable punishment for this crime. I don't believe we should be making people into felons after someone in a desperate act steals to try and feed themselves or their family. That action should still have consequences, but not one that would set them up for failure for the rest of their lives. I thank you all for your time and consideration and hope you'll support this bill. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from Androostock, Senator Stewart.

Senator **STEWART:** Thank you, Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Senate. I rise in opposition to the pending motion. I think we've seen this play out in real time in another state, California, who tried a very similar approach, and in that state, what they saw when they passed this legislation was a 29% increase in shoplifting and that sort of petty theft. So, while I can understand where the Good Representative from Knox is coming from, that's not reality. Reality is that even though we may not want this to encourage theft, in places that have tried it, that's exactly what has happened. Now, I'm as empathetic as anybody to the circumstance where somebody is trying to put food on the table for their family and this is a last resort, but so are the prosecutors and so are members of law enforcement who can also -- and judges, who can look at and use judicial discretion in those cases when that's actually what's happening. But that's not what's actually happening. What's actually happening, and why there's so much pushback from the retail lobby and all those that have stores that will be impacted by this, is that this is a way to increase the amount and latitude that's provided around petty theft. So, you can expect that if this bill passes here, we'll be the next California. Folks will be coming here and going to stores, stealing a certain dollar amount, and then onto the next one, because that's reality. That's what happens when these sorts of laws pass, not just in one state, but anywhere across the country. So, please reject this motion. We do not want to emulate California and become the next smash and grab state, which is what this bill is seeking to do. Thank you, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from Androscoggin, Senator Brakey.

Senator **BRAKEY:** Thank you, Mr. President. You know, we have many laws on the books establishing crimes for things that are victimless crimes, things that I often wonder why do we put these things on the books. But we have three charges. We're

supposed to protect life, we're supposed to protect liberty, and we're supposed to protect property. Those are the primary things we in government are tasked with protecting. We prohibit murder, we prohibit enslavement, we prohibit stealing. Those are crimes with clear victims. And I think certainly in light of what we've seen in places like California where the easing up on options to prosecute stealing has encouraged and led to more stealing. So, this is one of our primary charges. You know, as I was asking about this bill, and I was reviewing some of the testimony, and some of it, you know, I thought made some compelling points, but I think one of the things that really sold me that we should not be moving forward on this is the recognition that our judges already have a lot of discretion and our prosecutors already have a lot of discretion in terms of the cases and whether something rises to the level of charging someone under a felony for a third offense of stealing, certainly if there was -- circumstances can be taken into effect there. But I hope that we reject this motion, I hope that we stand for protecting people's property rights in the state and make -- have it be loud and clear don't steal. After all, those of us in government hate competition.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from Penobscot, Senator Guerin.

Senator **GUERIN:** Thank you, Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Senate. I bring you a first-person report from a sunny California day, when I was attending a Women in Government Conference. I arrived at my hotel, a very nice hotel, what appeared to be a nice neighborhood. I was there in time for lunch and the conference didn't start till dinner. So, I asked the concierge, are there any farmer's markets nearby, and he said yes, indeed, just right up this road outside the door, right straight up that road, about three-quarters of a mile. And I said perfect, it's such a lovely day for a walk. And his face clouded, and he said I'm sorry, ma'am, but it really wouldn't be safe for you to walk by yourself to the farmer's market. You would most likely have your purse stolen, or maybe worse. And I said well, I'm really not opposed to walking, and he said really, I urge you strongly not to walk by yourself. So, I took an Uber, and I went to the farmer's market, and they had a number of tables with two chairs at each little round table. I got my lunch, and all the tables were full, but I saw a gentleman, well dressed, in a suit, having his lunch, and I thought well, maybe I'll just ask him if I can join him. And so, I did, and I said would you mind if I shared your table, since it's crowded here today, and he said he would love the company. It turned out, he was an assistant DA in San Diego -- San Francisco, and he -- and so, we started talking government policy and he proudly told me he was a liberal progressive, but there was one thing that had happened in California that was ruining the state. He said we have changed our laws so that criminals walk free for what was considered petty things. And he said there's a man that lives in this neighborhood and yesterday was the 18th day in a row he had broken a car window to steal something out of the car or to check the glovebox. He said they take them in, and they release them, and that's it. And he said I'm a liberal progressive, but something's got to be done about this because it's ruining California. So, there's my first-person account. It was a unique opportunity, and I'm glad to share it with you.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from Oxford, Senator Keim.

Senator **KEIM:** Thank you, Mr. President. So, I also have sort of a first-person account of what's happening in California, and that is an eBay shopping experience. So, a friend of mine whose son is, you know, struggling with a lot of different things, now lives in California, and there -- it is very common for people who want to get money for drugs to go and steal from stores, they know exactly which items are most likely to sell on eBay, and those are the things they steal on a regular basis and they have booming online businesses selling this stuff. And, you know, for instance, a Keurig, that's one thing that's a hot ticket item, and mixers, things like that. So, they know exactly what they can go grab, walk out the door with, and sell on eBay. And I myself have looked on eBay for these types of appliances and notice that a number of them do come from California. So, if we pass this, then there will be enterprising new businesses here in Maine for people to have online retail stores that we can then get our goods at a lower cost. That will be helpful for our Maine businesses, I'm sure.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from Kennebec, Senator Hickman.

Senator **HICKMAN:** Thank you, Mr. President. What the bill in front of us amends Title 17-A, Section 353. In Title 17-A, Section 363, which remains unchanged by this proposal in front of the Senate, organized retail theft, which seems to be what a few other Senators are referring to in their testimony here. A person is guilty of organized retail theft if the person commits two or more thefts of retail merchandise under this chapter either as a principal or an accomplice, pursuant to a scheme or course of conduct engaged in by two or more persons involving theft from two or more retail stores for the purpose of selling the stolen merchandise or conducting fraudulent returns of stolen merchandise. Violation of this section is a Class C crime. That remains unchanged by this legislation. I just wanted to clear that up, Mr. President. Thank you very much.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from Penobscot, Senator Tipping.

Senator **TIPPING:** Thank you, Mr. President. In the spirit of further clarification, I'd just like to note that while retail theft may be up from 2021 to 2022 in California, it remains significantly down from pre-pandemic levels. I would also note that the charge, the misdemeanor charge for theft is -- results in jail time of up to six months. So, we're not talking about people stealing and being out the next day to steal, especially if they're repeat offenders. And I think, you know, for me, six months in jail is more than enough for someone that's stealing less than \$500. So, I don't feel the need in those cases where people are stealing, often in desperate straits right now to tie them with a felony conviction for the rest of their lives.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from Cumberland, Senator Carney.

Senator **CARNEY:** Thank you, Mr. President, thank you Colleagues of the Senate. I just rise to briefly provide some more information about the law. What I'm hearing in those who are opposing this motion is that we should not have an additional deterrent for the third conviction for theft. And I just would like to

point out that under the proposal that's being advanced in this Body today, that even if this proposal were adopted, it would still be an elevated offense. So, the current law provides that theft of property valued more than \$500 is a Class D crime. With this proposal in place, it would be a Class C crime for the third conviction, if that third conviction was more than \$500. So, again, we do -- this proposal, which I think is a really thoughtful balancing proposal, does maintain the elevated class of crime, it just is more consistent with the underlying statute of treating thefts or property value more than \$500 similarly.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from York, Senator Harrington.

Senator **HARRINGTON:** Thank you. I just wanted to clarify a point about the organized retail theft. I mean, obviously, that statute is in place, that is a much larger investigation, you would have to then prove that course of conduct, and if you only catch them on, say, their fifth stop of the day, that would be a single theft, it may not have risen to the level of organized retail theft yet. But again, just want to reiterate, one of the key points right after I spoke was someone getting something to eat. This bill doesn't stop at somebody stealing something less than \$20, that would've been a much more reasonable approach if that's the example that is repeatedly used that someone needing something as small as food or diapers, something like that, they could've said no more than \$100, but they chose no more than \$500 -- or up to \$500, rather. So, someone can steal a \$499 flat screen every day indefinitely and that will not become a felony, I think that is absurd. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from Cumberland, Senator Nangle.

Senator **NANGLE:** Thank you, Mr. President. I just did some quick math. It costs \$145 a day to incarcerate someone, \$145 a day in Maine prisons. The cost-benefit here does not make sense. These people are not walking away with no penalty whatsoever, they're still going to have a misdemeanor theft charge and if, as I've heard, so many judges and so many prosecutors aren't assessing this felony status, then why do we need the felony status? Also, this is well below the felony status of shoplifting, I believe theft of anything over \$2,000 is -- becomes a felony -- a thousand. So, anything over a thousand is a felony already. So, this is well below that. I think it's the reasonable thing to do and the fair thing to do. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from York, Senator Lawrence.

Senator **LAWRENCE:** Thank you, Mr. President, Men and Women of the Senate. Mr. President, I just rise to clarify a couple of different things. First of all, a judge cannot alter the charge that a prosecutor brings in, the judge cannot change the charges, those are in the view of the prosecutor when they bring them in. The second thing regarding the retail theft, and I in my district have one of those chains and I've prosecuted people for that. Nobody who's involved in a retail theft gang would ever steal less than \$500. They are trained, they are required to steal so much a day or otherwise they don't get paid. So, those people are well above \$500 a day in what they steal at any one mall or any one store. So, this is a good bill. It does what we need to do. For

misdemeanor crimes, we've been -- this past process of making them into felonies and all we've done is incarcerating more and more people, more and more people of color, more and more people who shouldn't be in our criminal justice system, and we have to find ways to decrease that and treat misdemeanor crimes like what they are, misdemeanors. Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from Cumberland, Senator Daughtry.

Senator **DAUGHTRY:** Thank you, Mr. President. May I pose a question through the Chair?

THE PRESIDENT: Seeing no objection.

Senator **DAUGHTRY:** Thank you, Mr. President. A question for anyone who can answer it, and I think someone might have said this, and I'm trying to go through my notes, there was a statement that this law also tries to get this portion of the code to align with a current piece of statute that has this threshold, so that the statutes align. If anyone could clarify that, it would be greatly appreciated.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from York, Senator Harrington.

Senator **HARRINGTON:** I would say it was actually quite the opposite. There are many places in statute where a third offense becomes a felony. This would be the only portion of Title 17 in the various theft by deception statutes in where that this would change the third conviction being a felony.

THE PRESIDENT: The pending question before the Senate is Acceptance of the Majority Ought to Pass as Amended Report. A roll call has been ordered. Is the Senate ready for the question?

The Chair noted the absence of the Senator from Lincoln, Senator **RENY**, and further excused the same Senator from today's Roll Call votes.

The Doorkeepers secured the Chamber.

The Secretary opened the vote.

ROLL CALL (#627)

YEAS: Senators: BAILEY, BEEBE-CENTER, BRENNER, CARNEY, CHIPMAN, CURRY, DAUGHTRY, DUSON, GROHOSKI, HICKMAN, INGWERSEN, LAWRENCE, NANGLE, PIERCE, RAFFERTY, ROTUNDO, TIPPING, VITELLI, PRESIDENT JACKSON

NAYS: Senators: BALDACCI, BENNETT, BLACK, BRAKEY, FARRIN, GUERIN, HARRINGTON, KEIM, LAFOUNTAIN, LIBBY, LYFORD, MOORE, POULIOT, STEWART, TIMBERLAKE

EXCUSED: Senators: RENY

19 Senators having voted in the affirmative and 15 Senators having voted in the negative, with 1 Senator being excused, the motion by Senator **BEEBE-CENTER** of Knox to **ACCEPT** the Majority **OUGHT TO PASS AS AMENDED** Report, in concurrence, **PREVAILED**.

Bill **READ ONCE**.

Committee Amendment "A" (H-846) **READ** and **ADOPTED**, in concurrence.

Under suspension of the Rules, **READ A SECOND TIME** and **PASSED TO BE ENGROSSED AS AMENDED**, in concurrence.

Out of order and under suspension of the Rules, the Senate considered the following:

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

House

Ought to Pass As Amended

The Committee on **EDUCATION AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS** on Bill "An Act to Amend Laws Affecting Tuition at State-approved Schools" H.P. 497 L.D. 808

Reported that the same **Ought to Pass as Amended by Committee Amendment "A" (H-860)**.

Comes from the House with the Report **READ** and **ACCEPTED** and the Bill **PASSED TO BE ENGROSSED AS AMENDED BY COMMITTEE AMENDMENT "A" (H-860)**.

Report **READ** and **ACCEPTED**, in concurrence.

Bill **READ ONCE**.

Committee Amendment "A" (H-860) **READ** and **ADOPTED**, in concurrence.

Under suspension of the Rules, **READ A SECOND TIME** and **PASSED TO BE ENGROSSED AS AMENDED**, in concurrence.

The Committee on **EDUCATION AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS** on Bill "An Act to Provide an Additional Allocation in the School Funding Formula to Cover Tax-exempt Property or a Large Economically Disadvantaged Student Population" (EMERGENCY) H.P. 897 L.D. 1402

Reported that the same **Ought to Pass as Amended by Committee Amendment "A" (H-859)**.

Comes from the House with the Report **READ** and **ACCEPTED** and the Bill **PASSED TO BE ENGROSSED AS AMENDED BY COMMITTEE AMENDMENT "A" (H-859)**.

Report **READ** and **ACCEPTED**, in concurrence.

Bill **READ ONCE**.

Committee Amendment "A" (H-859) **READ** and **ADOPTED**, in concurrence.

Under suspension of the Rules, **READ A SECOND TIME** and **PASSED TO BE ENGROSSED AS AMENDED**, in concurrence.

The Committee on **EDUCATION AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS** on Bill "An Act to Update the Laws Governing Education in the Unorganized Territory" H.P. 1304 L.D. 2042

Reported that the same **Ought to Pass as Amended by Committee Amendment "A" (H-861)**.

Comes from the House with the Report **READ** and **ACCEPTED** and the Bill **PASSED TO BE ENGROSSED AS AMENDED BY COMMITTEE AMENDMENT "A" (H-861)**.

Report **READ** and **ACCEPTED**, in concurrence.

Bill **READ ONCE**.

Committee Amendment "A" (H-861) **READ** and **ADOPTED**, in concurrence.

Under suspension of the Rules, **READ A SECOND TIME** and **PASSED TO BE ENGROSSED AS AMENDED**, in concurrence.

The Committee on **EDUCATION AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS** on Resolve, Regarding Legislative Review of Portions of Chapter 101: Maine Unified Special Education Regulation Birth to Age Twenty-Two, a Major Substantive Rule of the Department of Education (EMERGENCY) H.P. 1395 L.D. 2180

Reported that the same **Ought to Pass as Amended by Committee Amendment "A" (H-858)**.

Comes from the House with the Report **READ** and **ACCEPTED** and the Resolve **PASSED TO BE ENGROSSED AS AMENDED BY COMMITTEE AMENDMENT "A" (H-858)**.

Report **READ** and **ACCEPTED**, in concurrence.

Resolve **READ ONCE**.

Committee Amendment "A" (H-858) **READ** and **ADOPTED**, in concurrence.

Under suspension of the Rules, **READ A SECOND TIME** and **PASSED TO BE ENGROSSED AS AMENDED**, in concurrence.

The Committee on **EDUCATION AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS** on Resolve, Regarding Legislative Review of Portions of Chapter 132: Learning Results: Parameters for Essential Instruction, a Major Substantive Rule of the Department of Education (EMERGENCY)
H.P. 1397 L.D. 2182

Reported that the same **Ought to Pass as Amended by Committee Amendment "A" (H-857)**.

Comes from the House with the Report **READ** and **ACCEPTED** and the Resolve **PASSED TO BE ENGROSSED AS AMENDED BY COMMITTEE AMENDMENT "A" (H-857)**.

Report **READ** and **ACCEPTED**, in concurrence.
Resolve **READ ONCE**.

Committee Amendment "A" (H-857) **READ** and **ADOPTED**, in concurrence.

Under suspension of the Rules, **READ A SECOND TIME** and **PASSED TO BE ENGROSSED AS AMENDED**, in concurrence.

The Joint Select Committee on **HOUSING** on Bill "An Act to Provide Financial Support for Shelters for Unhoused Individuals"
H.P. 1360 L.D. 2136

Reported that the same **Ought to Pass as Amended by Committee Amendment "A" (H-862)**.

Comes from the House with the Report **READ** and **ACCEPTED** and the Bill **PASSED TO BE ENGROSSED AS AMENDED BY COMMITTEE AMENDMENT "A" (H-862)**.

Report **READ** and **ACCEPTED**, in concurrence.

Bill **READ ONCE**.

Committee Amendment "A" (H-862) **READ** and **ADOPTED**, in concurrence.

Under suspension of the Rules, **READ A SECOND TIME** and **PASSED TO BE ENGROSSED AS AMENDED**, in concurrence.

Senate

Ought to Pass As Amended

Senator BALDACCI for the Committee on **HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES** on Resolve, to Protect and Enhance Access to Behavioral Health Services in Androscoggin County and Surrounding Communities (EMERGENCY)
S.P. 898 L.D. 2105

Reported that the same **Ought to Pass as Amended by Committee Amendment "A" (S-614)**.

Report **READ** and **ACCEPTED**.

Resolve **READ ONCE**.

Committee Amendment "A" (S-614) **READ** and **ADOPTED**.

Under suspension of the Rules, **READ A SECOND TIME** and **PASSED TO BE ENGROSSED AS AMENDED**.

Sent down for concurrence.

Out of order and under suspension of the Rules, the Senate considered the following:

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

House

Ought to Pass Pursuant to Resolve

The Committee on **TRANSPORTATION** on Bill "An Act to Reconvene a Driver Education Working Group to Evaluate Hardships to Underserved Populations and Low-income Families" (EMERGENCY)
H.P. 1467 L.D. 2281

Reported that the same **Ought to Pass**, pursuant to Resolve 2023, chapter 94, section 6.

Comes from the House with the Report **READ** and **ACCEPTED** and the Bill **PASSED TO BE ENGROSSED**.

Report **READ** and **ACCEPTED**, in concurrence.

Under suspension of the Rules, **READ TWICE** and **PASSED TO BE ENGROSSED**, in concurrence.

All matters thus acted upon were ordered sent down forthwith for concurrence.

Off Record Remarks

and the entire Maine Senate. Would they please rise and accept the greetings and congratulations of the Maine Senate.

Off Record Remarks

On motion by Senator **VITELLI** of Sagadahoc, **ADJOURNED** until Thursday, March 28, 2024 at 10:00 in the morning in memory of and lasting tribute to Margaret Chase Smith.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes the Senator from Cumberland, Senator Duson.

Senator **DUSON:** I rise today, Mr. President, and my Fellow Colleagues of the Senate, in the tradition of honoring sports achievements of the youth in our community, I rise today to honor and recognize the achievements of Yousif Ibrahim of Cony High School here in Augusta. Yousif is a two-time regional all-star named by the Maine Soccer Coaches Association. He specializes as number ten, playing the role in central midfield and the offensive line. His tactical play is conducive to set up his teammates on both ends of the soccer pitch. Yousif's talents and work didn't go unnoticed. This past fall, Yousif had been called up by the Iraqi U20 national soccer team to train and participate in a month-long training camp in Iraq as part of the squad. Yousif, his dad, Rabeeah Ibrahim, and his mother, Mayda Abbas, are here with him today. His family are natives of Baghdad, Iraq. I'd like to also acknowledge the incredible support system behind Yousif. Rabeeah has a -- was a former player himself and practiced with Yousif at a young age. Yousif and his brother, Ali, would go out early and train and Ali is one of his firm supporters. His coaches, teachers, and the community in Augusta and around the state are proud of Yousif's determination. When interviewed by the Kennebec Journal, Yousif said Iraq is my home, it is my dream to have this opportunity, I'm grateful for the chance to represent my nation on the national soccer team. You don't get many people from Maine that go big in international soccer. Yousif's story is one of determination and sacrifice, early mornings and late nights, hours of practice and running drills. Yousif was also on track to graduate six months early to achieve his dream of playing for the squad. It is not only Yousif's talent and strong work ethic that sets him apart from his competition, but also his unwavering passion for the world's beautiful game. As you prepare to embark on this exciting opportunity to represent your country, know that you carry the hopes and aspirations of an entire community here in Maine and around the world. You are -- we are immensely proud of all that you have accomplished and have no doubt that you will continue to shine brightly as you represent Iraq on the international stage. Please join me in extending a heartfelt congratulations to Yousif. Let us rally behind our local star as he chases his dreams and continues his passion for soccer. Yousif will move to Iraq in a couple of months to begin his career playing professional soccer. We wish him success in his future endeavors. Let's keep an eye out for him on the pitch in international contest.

THE PRESIDENT: The Chair recognizes in the rear of the chamber, Yousif Ibrahim, he's joined today by his father Rabeeah Ibrahim and mother Maydah Abbas. They're from the city of Augusta, are the guests today of the Senator from Cumberland, Senator Duson and the Senator from Kennebec, Senator Pouliot