

Feb. 11, 2011

Good morning. Thank you for tuning in. I'm Rep. Emily Cain of Orono, House Democratic leader.

This week Governor LePage released his proposed state budget for the next two years. Although he addressed the legislature and has held numerous campaign-style press events on what he believes to be the good and exciting items in his budget, we're still waiting for many of the details on how the budget is actually balanced. Writing a budget that governs more than a million people and balances shrinking resources with growing needs is hard work, and the devil is in the details.

We don't disagree on everything. Based on what we know today, we appreciate the show of support for state education in Governor LePage's budget. We appreciate the show of interest from all of our Republican colleagues in committing to a bipartisan budget. And there are concepts where Democrats can agree with Governor LePage in his initial proposal.

But the way that he approaches those concepts often doesn't make sense, and will cause more harm than good. He called his budget a jobs bill; however, what we see in reality is a weakening of paychecks to thousands of Maine workers and retirees. We see a stalling of important investment that would create and support good paying jobs in growing Maine industries, and necessary upgrades to our state's infrastructure. We see a plan to pay for tax cuts that skew toward the wealthy by reaching into the pockets of people with fixed incomes.

Democrats support reducing income taxes. But they should be reduced in a way that is fair to people of all incomes. While just reducing the top rate will lower taxes for most Mainers, the benefits only get better and better the more money you make. People on fixed incomes have a much smaller portion of their income taxes reduced than people who earn a lot of money.

That's not just plainly unfair; it also makes really bad economic sense.

Those tax breaks, and many others are paid for by reducing the modest benefits that retirees in Maine paid for and earned throughout their entire lives.

The Governor talks a lot about reducing dependence on state services and programs, but he's short on offering alternatives. Setting a cutoff date for services doesn't help move Mainers toward independence because it treats a symptom of the problem and ignores the cause for people to need state support in the first place. They're poor, sick, hungry and lack necessary skills. They still will be when support is taken away if we don't treat the root of the problem: they need access to better paying jobs. They need education and training. They need access to health care and economic opportunity. Rather than support these tools, Governor LePage's budget only weakens them.

Telling people that the answer is simply to “get a job” is insulting to the thousands of Mainers who have been trying to do just that, every day. Let’s focus on creating those jobs, not demonizing all of the people who can’t find them.

This is a very sensitive time for Maine. Our economy is just starting to turn around. But stalling critical investments in our economy and infrastructure, and cutting the incomes of thousands of Maine folks who earn a modest living will put a screeching halt to that growth and push Maine backwards. Now more than ever, we need to govern on facts, not anecdotes. We hope that Governor LePage and Republicans in the Legislature are ready and willing to meet us in the middle. It’s never been more important than it is today.

Thanks for listening.

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