

Maine Legislature

House Democratic Office

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REP. GRAHAM: CHALLENGES REQUIRE US TO FIND COMMON GROUND, BUILD ON STRENGTHS

Good morning.

I am Representative Anne Graham, and I serve the people of Gray, North Yarmouth and Pownal in the Maine House. I am also House chair of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government.

Our communities and local property taxpayers are facing the possibility of an enormous tax increase. Governor Paul LePage's proposed two-year budget relies on a tax shift that places an undue burden on our towns, cities and their residents and businesses.

Officials in my district tell me that they can't withstand this strain. I imagine that the \$425 million tax shift in the governor's budget is having similar effects all over our state.

The property taxes increases that will result from the governor's budget proposal will create unnecessary hardship for many Mainers. I am particularly concerned for our elderly neighbors, many of whom are living on fixed-incomes and have little -- if any -- cushion in their household budgets.

The tax shift breaks a promise between the state and our local communities. The governor's budget suspends the longstanding revenue-sharing agreement that communities rely on for their roads, schools and public safety.

The governor's budget also includes the elimination of key property tax reduction measures and cuts excise tax revenues used for local infrastructure projects.

Another troubling part of the tax shift is the added educational expenses for local districts. These new costs would come at a time when school costs already account for three-quarters of the local budget for many communities.

I fear that our communities and residents are trapped between the loss of important services – including educational programming -- and property tax increases they cannot afford.

Democrats are not the only ones worried about the tax shift. I know Republican lawmakers share our concerns. And the conservative Tax Foundation in Washington, D.C., has also made note of the suspension of funding to local government.

It's clear that our state's challenges are too big for one party to solve on its own. We must come together if we are to find sensible solutions.

That is why I am one of the lawmakers leading a bipartisan group called the Common Ground Caucus. It's this kind of cooperation and collaboration that we believe is necessary to get our flagging economy moving and grow our middle class.

I'm also a big believer in positive thinking. While we do face significant challenges, we have many strengths and much to be proud of. Mainers are known for their ingenuity and work ethic. We are home to strong schools, communities and families. Our natural resources, from our mountains and forests to our rocky shores, are the envy of many.

I believe in Maine. We need to build on our strengths to move forward.

I know my colleagues here in Augusta believe in Maine as much as I do. Let us build on that common ground.

This is Representative Anne Graham of North Yarmouth.

Thank you for listening this morning. Have a warm and safe snowy weekend.