

February 8, 2018

2018 Leadership Summit makes policy discussion front and center ———

— **Roundtable topics center on taxes, referendums, workforce needs, workplace issues, and energy and infrastructure**



For the past 19 years, the Maine State Chamber's annual Leadership Summit has provided board members and business leaders an opportunity to discuss critical public policy issues with key public officials from both sides of the aisle, as well as with administrators and representatives of the executive branch. Again this year, the Chamber's board of directors and key business leaders gathered with legislative leaders and members of the LePage administration on Thursday and Friday, February 1-2 at Sunday River with the shared goal of finding ways to

move Maine forward.

The Leadership Summit becomes increasingly popular each year, and this year's was especially so—with our largest turnout yet at approximately 130 participants. Participants gathered to discuss some of the challenges affecting Maine's economy and relevant legislation facing the second regular session of the 128th Legislature, as well as to identify common policy priorities, all in an effort to move our state ahead.

After the opening reception and din-

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LCRED committee divides on minimum wage "cooling off" bill

LD 1757 would slow the rate of minimum wage increases

In a party line 7-6 vote, the Joint standing Committee on Labor, Commerce, Research and Economic Development (LCRED), split on a proposal to slow the rate of minimum wage increases authorized by a 2016 referendum question, and to institute a training wage for youth under the age of 18. All six of the Republicans on the committee voted to support the bill, while the seven majority Democrats voted against the proposal.

The bill in question – **LD 1757, An Act To Protect Maine's Economy by Slowing the Rate at Which the State's Minimum Wage Will Increase and Establishing a Training and Youth Wage**, submitted at the request of Governor Paul LePage and sponsored by Rep. Joel Stetkis (R-Canaan) – proposed a variety of changes to the minimum wage law passed at in November 2016.

At issue is the tremendous pressure small businesses have felt regarding the significant increases in the cost of doing business in the slightly more than 12 months the new law has been in effect. The public hearing on the bill, held slightly more than two weeks ago, lasted nearly 8 hours, with dozens of small businesses testifying before the committee asking for some relief. Besides the concerns expressed with respect

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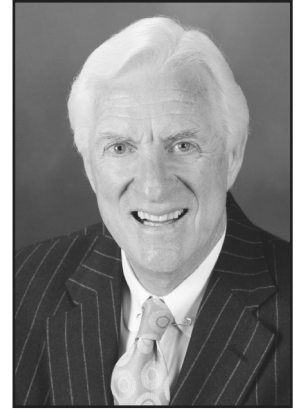
About the Maine State Chamber of Commerce:

Since 1889, the Maine State Chamber has been fighting to lower your cost of doing business. Through our Grassroots Action Network and OneVoice program, we work with a network of approximately 5,000 companies statewide who see the value in such a service and provide the financial support that keeps our access, advocacy, and assistance efforts going strong. As Maine's Chamber, we make sure that the business environment of the state continues to thrive. The Maine State Chamber of Commerce advocates on behalf of their interests before the legislature and regulatory agencies and through conferences, seminars, and affiliated programs.

A message from the president...

"Leadership Summit increases understanding between business and legislative leaders..."

by Dana Connors



Last week, we hosted our 19th annual Leadership Summit, and once again, it didn't disappoint. You can read all about it starting on page 1. Each year, as I reflect on this event, I'm grateful for the willingness of legislators and business leaders to come together for frank, open dialog to the public policy issues facing our state.

In her recent blog, Deb Neuman, president and CEO of the Bangor Region Chamber of Commerce, provided the following insights into our 2018 Leadership Summit. While you can read the entire blog online at www.bangorregion.com/news/category/debs-blog, we wanted to share these excerpts of her perspective with you:

"What do you get when you combine business leaders with Statehouse leaders and put them together in a hotel high up on a mountain on Sunday River? Answer: Conversation, collaboration, education, information and understanding.

I had the privilege to attend the 2018 Leadership Summit organized by the Maine State Chamber February 1 and 2. Attendees included business owners and leaders from Portland to MDI to Madawaska, along with legislative leadership, chancellors and presidents from educational institutions, economic development leaders, and representatives from [local/regional] chambers of commerce. The event was held at the Jordan Hotel high up on a mountain in Sunday River. The location meant that for two days we were not going anywhere, affording us the opportunity to focus on the program and the reason we were there.

Kudos to the Maine State Chamber for organizing this event and for a program that was meant to encourage conversation."

"The conversations were open, informative, and sometimes lively, as the business community shared their thoughts, insights and concerns with our representatives from both sides of the aisle who represent both large and small communities in Maine.

This led to an understanding of the challenges faced by businesses and the challenges faced by those who represent us in Augusta."

"There were differing opinions on some of these topics, agreement on others and more questions than answers on others. Understanding the questions is the first step to finding the answers. Thanks again to the Maine State Chamber for organizing this event and for the opportunity to participate."

Deb, the team at the chamber is humbled by your compliments and insights on this event! On behalf of the board and staff of the Maine State Chamber, I'd also like to thank the attendees and sponsors of this very unique event. Without their willing participation and support, we would not have the opportunity to build statewide collaboration and understanding for the many issues affecting our employers, their employees, and their communities. □

This week LCRED committee tackles two HR issues

As this edition goes to press, the Joint Standing Committee on Labor, Commerce, Research and Economic Development (LCRED) is in the midst of a very busy week, dealing with a number of their “carry over” pieces of legislation, as well as new bills submitted at the beginning of this session. As of press time, the committee held a work session on “ban the box” legislation, and a public hearing on a bill that would step-up a paid Family Medical Leave system financed by employee contributions.

“Ban the Box” Legislation...

Originally submitted at the end of last session, **LD 1566, *An Act To Enact the Maine Fair Chance Employment Act***, sponsored by Rep. Rachel Talbot Ross (D-Portland), as drafted was a fairly sweeping progressive piece of legislation that sought to prohibit all employers in Maine from inquiring about a job applicant’s previous criminal history. Specifically, the bill would not allow employers to have a question on a job application asking if they had ever been convicted of a crime. The original bill went far beyond that, however, including the creation of a new protected class of employees for hiring purposes, discrimination protection for former criminals, and rights of action against employers for violation the law.

The Maine State Chamber and others in the business community opposed the original bill, and the committee decided to carry the bill over to this session in order to the give the sponsor time to develop alternate language.

At the LCRED committee’s work session on Tuesday, February 6, the sponsor submitted a stripped-down version of the bill, making it applicable only to public sector employers – namely the State of Maine. No state agency may inquire about an applicant’s previous criminal history on a job application unless required to under state or federal statute. Such

inquiries are allowed during the interview process, and criminal background checks are also not impacted. However, the state may only refuse to hire an applicant with a criminal history only if their previous crime has some direct bearing on the job.

“Ban the box” legislation is nothing new. Nationally, about half the states have enacted some form of banning the practice of asking these questions on job applications. Supporters of the proposal link it to workforce development – individuals transitioning from the criminal justice system represent an untapped source of workers, many of whom turn into productive and gratified employees give the chance to succeed.

The committee appeared to agree with the amended version of the bill, particularly since it did not extend to the private workplace. As of this writing, with some members yet to vote, nine bipartisan members of the committee had voted “ought to pass” and only one against.

Paid Family Medical Leave...

In a separate public hearing Wednesday, February 7, the committee took public testimony on **LD 1587, *An Act To Provide Economic Security to Maine Families through the Creation of a Paid Family Medical Leave System***, sponsored by Rep. Erin Herbig, (D-Belfast). This bill did not get a public hearing in 2017 and was carried over to the 2018 session. As drafted, the bill would create a paid FMLA system not unlike the current Unemployment Insurance system. The bill envisions employees paying into the fund in order to access up to eight weeks of benefits at 66% of wages. It would, in some ways, mirror the state’s unpaid FLMA law, by having it apply to any employer with 15 or more employees, but differ in an expanded definition “family members” that might trigger the leave.

This is an extremely complex bill, with considerable moving parts and

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Taxation committee tables shipbuilding bill

— Bill will help to sustain jobs and investment in Maine’s shipbuilding industry

On Thursday, February 7, the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation held a work session on **LD 1781, *An Act to Encourage New Major Investment in Shipbuilding Facilities and the Preservation of Jobs***. Sponsored by Rep. Jennifer Deschant (D-Bath), the bill was tabled pending further discussion.

As originally drafted, the bill would provide a 3% income tax credit for investments in shipbuilding facilities made after January 1, 2018, as long as certain employment levels are maintained. Dana Connors, president of the Maine State Chamber of Commerce testified on January 30 in strong support of LD 1781, noting that this bill will ensure future jobs and investment in Maine’s shipbuilding industry. BIW currently has 5,600 employees with an average salary of \$60,820. Maine’s shipbuilding facilities credit expired in 2017. Over the lifetime of that credit, the facility was only required to spend \$200 million, but instead spent over two and a half times that amount (\$500 million) since receiving the credit in 1998.

At Thursday’s work session, Rep. DeChant proposed an amendment that would do several things. First, in the definition of “qualified investment,” it inserts the word “development” after training to ensure that the investment accomplishes both. It shortens the number of years the credit can be taken with the initial investment of \$100 million from 19 to 9. The amendment allows for additional credit through year 20, if at least another \$100 million is invested after January 1, 2025. It would also require that any unused credit be carried forward rather than fully refundable. The amendment would also add an annual reporting requirement that the credit applicant report the following information to the State Tax Assessor: employ-

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Leadership Summit... (Continued from Page 1...)

ner, Alec Porteous, commissioner of the Maine Department of Administrative and Financial Services, provided an overview of the implications of the recent changes to the federal tax code. After dinner, Senate President Michael Thibodeau (R-Waldo) and Senate Minority Leader Sen. Troy Jackson (D-Aroostook), along with Rep. Drew Gattine (D-Westbrook), chair of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, and Rep. Tom Winsor (R-Norway), ranking member of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, discussed the Legislature's priorities in the coming months. Legislative leadership also provided Maine State Chamber board members and guests with their thoughts on a variety of policy issues, including the impact of the recent citizen's initiatives questions on the legislative calendar as well as changes to the referendum process; workforce and economic development incentives, such as Pine Tree Zones and the Shipbuilding Tax Credit (see page 3); and, the \$250 million bond issue recently proposed by Governor Paul LePage.

Friday morning continued the long-standing tradition of roundtable breakout sessions. Because of the number of critical issues likely to be debated this session, four breakout sessions were convened to focus on education and workforce, workplace issues, taxation and citizen's initiatives, and investments and infrastructure. Each of the one-hour sessions resulted in thoughtful and meaningful dialogue between business leaders and policy makers that hopefully will help shape the discussions in the Statehouse this session as well as going forward.

The Education & Workforce group was facilitated by Michael Bourque of MEMIC and Megan Sanborn of the Maine State Chamber. These sessions discussed the critical need to grow our workforce; the progress of educational

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Leadership Summit... **(Continued from Page 4...)**



institutions becoming more “nimble” to adapt to the needs to employers and to partner closely with one another; the need for employers, state government and educational institutions to engage and work together to address our workforce needs of the future; understanding the changing workforce to attract younger workers, retain the older population (offer flexibility), and to be more open and welcoming of immigrants; addressing needs of adults not working due to the opioid crisis, child care issues, etc.; tax rates relative to workforce attraction and retention; and the need for Maine to better promote its positive “brand” to attract workers,



The Workplace Issues group was facilitated by Rick Malinowski of Procter & Gamble and Peter Gore of the Maine State Chamber. These sessions explored the concerns of employers trying to understand and comply with the marijuana legalization laws and drug testing in the workplace; paid FMLA leave; minimum wage; defining exempt and non-exempt workers; and, overtime conformity.

The Taxation & Citizen’s Initiatives group was facilitated by Larry Wold of TD Bank and Linda Caprara of the Maine State Chamber. These sessions included the need for predictability and stability in the tax code; federal tax conformity with the recent federal code changes; the benefits of Pine Tree Zones as well as accountability and transparency; ways to make Maine more attractive and competitive to business and workers; and, the citizen’s initiative process and its implications on public policy.



The Investments & Infrastructure group was facilitated by Clifton Greim of Harriman Associates and Ben Gilman for the Maine State Chamber. These sessions explored ways to close the transportation funding gap; broadband progress and completion of the “last mile;” the importance of predictable energy policies to

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Leadership Summit... (Continued from Page 5...)

attract new business investment; the need to be proactive with our water policies; and, the R&D bond issue.

The success of the 2018 Leadership Summit is centered on the highly-engaged participation of legislators, cabinet officials and leadership. Including President Thibodeau and Sen. Jackson, 24 legislators from key joint standing committees, and five administrators from critical departments joined us, including:

- ♦ **Sen. Catherine Breen** (D-Falmouth), member of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs;
- ♦ **Sen. Andre Cushing III** (R-Penobscot County), member of the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation;
- ♦ **Sen. Dana Dow** (R-Waldoboro), chair of the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation;
- ♦ **Sen. James Hamper** (R-Oxford), chair of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs;
- ♦ **Sen. Lisa Keim** (R-Dixfield), chair of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary Committee;
- ♦ **Sen. Brian Langley** (R-Hancock), chair of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs;
- ♦ **Rep. Susan Austin** (R-Gray), member of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor, Commerce, Research and Economic Development;
- ♦ **Rep. Seth Berry** (D-Bowdoinham), chair of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology;
- ♦ **Rep. Paul Chace** (R-Durham), member of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services;
- ♦ **Rep. Kathleen Dillingham** (R-Oxford), member of the Joint

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Leadership Summit... **(Continued from Page 6...)**

Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs;

- ♦ **Rep. Bradlee Farrin** (R-Norridgewock), member of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans & Legal Affairs;
- ♦ **Rep. Robert Foley** (R-Wells), member of the Joint Standing Committee on Insurance and Finance Services;
- ♦ **Rep. Drew Gattine** (D-Westbrook), chair of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs;
- ♦ **Rep. Martin Grohman** (I-Biddeford), member of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety;
- ♦ **Rep. Andrew McLean** (D-Gorham), chair of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation;
- ♦ **Rep. Wayne Parry** (R-Arundel), member of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation;
- ♦ **Rep. Matthew Pouliot** (R-Augusta), member of the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation;
- ♦ **Rep. Harold “Trey” Stewart III** (R-Presque Isle), member of the Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs;
- ♦ **Rep. Nathan Wadsworth** (R-Hiram), member of the Joint Standing Committee on Energy, Utilities and Technology;
- ♦ **Rep. Tom Winsor** (R-Norway), member of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs;
- ♦ **Hon. Barry Hobbins**, Public Advocate, Maine Public Advocate Office;
- ♦ **Mr. Steven McGrath**, director of the Governor’s Energy Office; and,
- ♦ **Mr. Alec Porteous**, commissioner of

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Leadership Summit... (Continued from Page 7...)

the Maine Department of Administrative and Financial Services.

We would like to thank everyone who took the time to travel to Sunday River for our 2018 Leadership Summit and participate in the event. We especially wish to thank legislative leaders, administrators, legislators, and our board members for their participation. Without their willingness to engage in a constructive and frank dialogue, this event would not be the success it is each year.

We would also like to extend our sincere gratitude for the generosity of our sponsors:

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Proficiency-based diplomas produce better-rounded and more highly-skilled graduates

On Wednesday morning, February 7, the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs held a public hearing on **LD 1666, An Act to Ensure the Successful Implementation of Proficiency-based Diplomas by Extending the Timeline for Phasing in Their Implementation**, sponsored by the committee's House Chair, Rep. Victoria Kornfield (D-Bangor). The Maine State Chamber testified in opposition to the bill.

Throughout the past few years, this committee has been hearing bills on proficiency-based learning standards and aligned assessments and their attention and thoughtfulness on these complex and intertwined issues is much appreciated.

Maine's business community is incredibly invested in our state's PreK-12 public education system. Businesses' care about schools and our communities, businesses

want students to be successful and prepared for what their futures might be. Our students, our teachers, and the entire system deserve our investment. We appreciate all the hard work our public schools and learning communities are doing to graduate students so that they are well-prepared for college and the workplace. Change is hard – we know that – but this change is needed. The business community believes this change will better prepare today's students for tomorrow's workforce.

To that end, we encourage the Education committee to stay the course on the previously enacted education reforms and reject any bills that will attempt to delay proficiency based diplomas. Delaying it again would send the message to students that what they're working on will change again. Students in grades K-9 are on the 1 to 4 grading sys-

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Minimum Wage...

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to meeting the challenges of the \$2.50 increase in the minimum wage that has gone into effect in approximately 13 months, the real fear expressed by the nearly 50 businesses that attended, many from small rural towns and regions, was how they will be able to integrate yet another dollar-an-hour increase into their business models next January – followed by another dollar-an-hour increase in 2020 (a 38% increase in wage-and-hour costs in less than four years) – and still remain viable and open for business.


While the bill contained a number of provisions that would have reduced the minimum wage, slowed future increases, eliminate the indexing portion of current law, and established a two tiered training wage, the “ought to pass” Republican minority report on LD 1757 differs somewhat from the original.

As amended, the proposal is to freeze the minimum wage at \$10 an hour until January 1, 2020, thereby allowing for a 12-month “cooling off” period that would give the many struggling small business a chance to catch up. In 2020, the minimum wage would increase by 50 cents an hour to \$10.50, and then 50 cents more each year until 2023, when the statewide minimum wage would reach \$12 an hour. After that, any indexing tied to changes in the consumer price index (CPI) would kick in from there forward.

In addition, the amendment proposes to establish a “training wage” for workers under the age of 18 for the first 200 hours of employment equal to 80% of the state minimum wage or the federal minimum wage, whichever is higher. It is important to note that any employer is free to increase the wages paid to a youth worker at any time before the 200-hour mark is reached.

Some will likely accuse supporters and the small business community of “taking something away” from workers or not “keeping faith with the voters.” Neither is true. The minimum wage in Maine as

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Public Hearings

Public hearings are open to everyone. This public hearing schedule is subject to change. Questions may be directed to the Secretary of the Senate's Office at (207) 287-1540. For the most current schedule, please visit <http://legislature.maine.gov/lto/committee-membership/9089/> or contact the committee clerk.

Tuesday, February 13, 2018

Taxation

1:00 p.m.; State House, Room 127

LD 1796, An Act To Improve the Effectiveness of the New Markets Capital Investment Credit (Rep. Tipping of Orono)

LD 1805, An Act To Amend the Maine Tax Laws (Sen. Dow of Lincoln)

Transportation

1:00 p.m.; State House, Room 126

LD 1806, An Act To Ensure Equity in the Funding of Maine's Transportation Infrastructure by Imposing an Annual Fee on Hybrid and Electric Vehicles (Rep. Parry of Arundel)

Wednesday, February 14, 2018

Environment and Natural Resources

10:00 a.m.; Cross Building, Room 216

LD 1797, Resolve, Regarding Legislative Review of Portions of Chapter 418: Maine Solid Waste Management Rules: Beneficial Use of Solid Wastes, a Major Substantive Rule of the Department of Environmental Protection (Emergency; Rep. Tucker of Brunswick)

Health and Human Services

3:00 p.m.; Cross Building, Room 209

LD 1774, An Act To Reduce Child Poverty by Leveraging Investments in Families for Tomorrow (Speaker Gideon of Freeport)

Veterans and Legal Affairs

9:00 a.m.; State House, Room 437

LD 1780, An Act To Transfer Funds to the Maine Clean Election Fund To Provide Adequate Funding for Maine Clean Election Fund Candidates (Rep. Luchini of Ellsworth)

LD 1802, Resolve, Regarding Legislative Review of Portions of Chapter 3: Maine Clean Election Act and Related Provisions, a Major Substantive Rule of the Commission on Governmental Ethics and Election Practices (Emergency; Rep. Luchini of Ellsworth)

LD 1803, Resolve, Regarding Legislative Review of Chapter 28: Advanced Deposit Wagering, a Major Substantive Rule of the Gambling Control Board (Emergency; Rep. Luchini of Ellsworth)

Thursday, February 15, 2018

Appropriations and Financial Affairs

2:00 p.m.; State House, Room 228

LD 1815, An Act To Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue To Improve Multimodal Facilities, Highways and Bridges (Sen. Hamper of Oxford)

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Minimum Wage...

(Continued from Page 9...)

directed from the ballot booth in 2016 remains headed to \$12 an hour. Indexing remains in place. All this bill would do is give the many rural small businesses that are contacting their legislator about this issue, a chance to adapt their business models and find a way to absorb what is nearly a 100% overall increase in Maine's minimum wage slated to go into effect in just four years. Failure to do so will result in significant economic damage in those areas of our state; the outcome of which is fewer hours, fewer people with jobs, and fewer businesses open.

The Maine State Chamber fully supports the minority "ought to pass" report on LD 1757 and urges legislators from both sides of the aisle to also support the amendment. For additional information or questions, please contact Peter Gore by calling (207) 623-4568, ext. 107, or by emailing pgore@mainechamber.org.

tem, which includes the Class of 2021. Students in grades 10 through 12 are on the old system.

While the graduation rate in Maine has been rising, there is a gap between the percentage of students who graduate and those who are proficient in math and reading, and a third of graduates who go onto college in Maine need basic remedial courses. As Maine moves toward awarding diplomas based on proficiency rather than time served, students can be more confident that the diplomas they've earned signify they are adequately prepared for success at the next step.

In recent years, modern ideas for learning-based on proficiency have been adopted in several states, including Maine, and they are starting to work. As you know in a proficiency-based learning system students' instruction and assessments are aligned to make sure they have

a mastery of a core subject before they proceed to the next level or receive a diploma. This system tells us so much more about what a student has learned. It is tougher and more rigorous than previous learning models. But it's also more engaging for students, and it gives us a better idea of our students' grasp of critical skills, and helps them develop critical thinking and problem solving. Under the system students are evaluated on Habits of Work which include, but are not limited to, taking responsibility for learning, class attendance, and managing emotions. This gives parents a much better understanding of their child's specific strengths and weaknesses. It can also help increase their verbal and written communications skills. All of these are skills employers are reporting increasingly missing in younger workers.

Producing better-rounded and more highly-skilled graduates will also keep businesses investing in our state, and potentially attract more businesses to Maine. When our students succeed, Maine businesses succeed, and our state's economy and competitiveness greatly benefits.

We owe it to each and every Maine student to get the very best education available, no matter where they live and attend school, so that every Maine student has the best possible chance for college or career success.

The Chamber urges the committee to stay the course on current proficiency-based learning models. For more information or questions, please contact Megan Sanborn by calling (207) 623-4568, ext. 108, or by emailing msanborn@mainechamber.org. □



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Digest of New Legislation

Maine Chamber staff have studied each of these recently printed bills to assess potential impact on business trends. If you have concerns regarding any bill, please communicate those concerns to a member of our governmental services staff at (207) 623-4568.

ENVIRONMENTAL

LD 1808, An Act To Implement Recommendations Resulting from a State Government Evaluation Act Review of the Department of Environmental Protection by the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources. (Rep. Tucker, D-Brunswick) Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources. This bill, which is reported out by the Joint Standing Committee on Environment and Natural Resources pursuant to the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 3, section 955, subsection 4, implements the recommendations resulting from the committee's State Government Evaluation Act review of the Department of Environmental Protection as follows:

1. It removes a statutory provision prohibiting a repeat violator of the same environmental law from taking advantage of a supplemental environmental project to mitigate an assessed civil penalty;
2. It allows a violator of an environmental law to offset up to 100% of an assessed civil penalty by conducting a supplemental environmental project. Under current law, such a violator may offset no more than 80% of an assessed civil penalty by conducting a supplemental environmental project;
3. It clarifies two statutory exemptions from the requirement that air contamination sources maintain continuous emission monitoring systems to mitigate a conflict between the current statutory provisions on continuous emission monitoring and existing applicable federal regulations; and,
4. It provides that the solid waste generation and disposal capacity report the department currently must submit annually to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over environmental and natural resources matters must be submitted only biennially. □

Shipbuilding...

(Continued from Page 3...)

ment both at beginning and end of report year; number of employees covered by collective bargaining agreement; total employees hired since end of prior year; average salary and wages broken out by production and non-production jobs, and the total dollar figure spent on goods and services from businesses in state; and the incremental level of qualified investment. In addition, the amendment inserts a provision to include the credit in the tax expenditure review process by Office of Program Evaluation and Government Accountability (OPEGA). The amendment includes a requirement that the OPEGA provide the Taxation committee with a report evaluating this credit.

The committee tabled the bill pending further discussion to a date to be determined. If you have any questions, please contact Linda Caprara by calling or (207) 623-4568, ext. 106, or emailing lcaprara@mainechamber.org. □

LCRED Update...

(Continued from Page 3...)

unknowns. The Maine State Chamber was asked by the bill's sponsor to meet and discuss the issues we saw with the bill. In those meetings, we urged that before the committee or legislature decided to undertake the establishment of such a program, an in-depth actuarial study be carried out to determine the likely take up, the benefit structure, contribution rates, and total amount of funding necessary to make the program both capitalized and sustainable. Rep. Herbig presented such an amendment to the committee at the public hearing. She hopes to find private, external funding sources for the study in time for a report back by the beginning of the 129th Legislature. The committee is expected to take the bill up in work session next week.

For any additional information or questions, please contact Peter Gore by calling (207) 623-4568, ext. 107, or by emailing pgore@mainechamber.org. □



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Equal access to technology tools helps employees thrive

It's an all-too-frequent scenario: A company builds a website or purchases a new technology application, implements it, pays for it, and then learns that some employees or customers with disabilities cannot use it, because it's inaccessible. Then, they're faced with making costly retroactive fixes to ensure it's usable by everyone.

Business Sense: A Roadmap for Buying Accessible Tech for Your Workplace...

While these kinds of accessibility missteps are typically unintentional, they can easily be avoided. And now, there's a free online tool to guide businesses in procuring accessible information technology (IT) — Buy IT: Your Guide for Purchasing Accessible Technology (<http://www.peatworks.org/buy-it>). The online resource, Buy IT!, helps employers and their purchasing staff build accessibility and usability into their information and communication technology (ICT) procurement processes.

The tool was recently launched by the Partnership on Employment & Accessible Technology (PEAT; <http://www.peatworks.org/>), an initiative funded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy. Featuring background and sample language, Buy IT offers step-by-step guidance on researching IT vendors, specifying accessibility requirements in Requests for Proposals (RFPs), and validating the accessibility of product choices. By helping businesses buy and implement technology that works for everyone, Buy IT reduces technology-related barriers many employees, job seekers and customers with disabilities face, which, by extension, is also good for their bottom line.

Giving your current and prospective workers equal access to technology tools helps employees thrive on the job. Of course, implementing accessible technology means buying it in the first place, and *Buy IT* can demystify the process.

For additional news and resources, sign

up for ODEP's e-mail updates at <https://www.dol.gov/general/email>, or visit <https://www.dol.gov/odep/BusinessSense/2017/bsense1217.htm>.

Getting Started in ICT Procurement...

Why is ICT procurement such a crucial part of achieving accessibility and usability for all? Because *implementing* accessible workplace technology means *buying* accessible technology in the first place. It means doing vendor research, specifying your requirements, and validating the accessibility of your product choices prior to accepting and implementing them. Most importantly, it means approaching ICT procurement with an eye toward accessibility and usability from the very beginning.

Buy IT! features background information, sample language, and effective

procurement practices that will guide your business toward more accessible ICT purchases. And through the process, you'll find that the procurement practices for achieving better accessibility are best practices for strengthening your procurement operation in general.

Ready to get started? Follow these planning, solicitation, and post-award steps for successful implementation:

- ♦ **Step 1, Setting Procurement Priorities:**
<http://www.peatworks.org/buy-IT/priorities>
- ♦ **Step 2, Preparing to Buy:**
<http://www.peatworks.org/buy-IT/preparing>
- ♦ **Step 3, Issuing Your Solicitation:**
<http://www.peatworks.org/buy-IT/solicitation>

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Business Day at the Statehouse

Thursday, March 8 ♦ 8:00 a.m. to Noon
Statehouse Hall of Flags



The Maine State Chamber of Commerce is hosting its annual Business Day at the Statehouse on Thursday, March 8, 2018, from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. in the Hall of Flags (Statehouse, Second Floor).

For more information or to RSVP, please contact Linda Caprara, director of grassroots advocacy, by calling (207) 623-4568, ext. 106, or by emailing lcaprara@mainechamber.org. With your participation, the “Voice of Maine Business” will resonate throughout Augusta!



Thank you to the sponsors of 2018 Business Day at the Statehouse:

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Maine BLN... (Continued from Page 14...)

- ♦ **Step 4, Evaluating Proposals & VPATs:** <http://www.peatworks.org/buy-IT/evaluating>
- ♦ **Step 5, Negotiating Contracts:** <http://www.peatworks.org/buy-IT/negotiating>
- ♦ **Step 6, Testing & Validation:** <http://www.peatworks.org/buy-IT/testing>
- ♦ **Step 7, Managing Performance & Relationships:** <http://www.peatworks.org/buy-IT/relationships>
- ♦ **Step 8, Reviewing & Learning:** <http://www.peatworks.org/buy-IT/learning>

A program administered by the Maine State Chamber, in partnership with the Maine DOL, the Maine Business Leadership Network (BLN) is a statewide, employer-driven program designed for business leaders to promote hiring practices that enable qualified people with disabilities to enter and succeed in the workplace. The Maine Business Leadership Network offers employers access to pertinent disability hiring information; a network of employers who share information on common disability employment issues; exposure to qualified job applicants and disabilities; opportunities to provide training and work experience for job seekers with disabilities; and, improved access to customers with disabilities.

Many Business Leadership Networks were established as part of a national initiative started by the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) and supported by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. The U.S. Business Leadership Network (USBLN) is now the national organization providing guidance and support.

For more information about how to become a BLN member, contact Joyce LaRoche, program administrator, by calling (207) 623-4568, ext. 113, or by emailing director@mainebln.org, or visit <http://mainebln.org/>. □

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Legislative Strictly Social

Wed., February 28 ♦ 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. ♦ The Senator Inn & Spa (Western Avenue, Augusta)

COMPLIMENTARY HORS D'OEUVRES & CASH BAR

The Maine State Chamber invites you to its **FREE Legislative Strictly Social** networking reception. Our annual Legislative Strictly Social is an ideal way for you, the Maine business leader, to interact with legislators, business associates, new and prospective Maine State Chamber members, and government representatives in a relaxed setting. **Please register by emailing your complete contact information to kmorrell@mainechamber.org.**

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