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Governor LePage addresses County leaders at NMCC/LEAD breakfast

Aroostook County – Economic and workforce development for northernmost Maine were at forefront of a breakfast event attended by Governor Paul LePage and Aroostook County leaders today at Northern Maine Community College in Presque Isle.

LePage, who was the featured speaker at the event co-hosted by Leaders Encouraging Aroostook Development and NMCC in honor of the organizations 25th and 50th Anniversaries respectively, shared his priorities for the State with the 100 individuals gathered for the event, telling them that the key areas will be energy, education and the economy.

“Energy is a major obstacle that hinders our economy. We’ll be working on trying to get natural gas to as many parts of the state as possible. In Maine, we are 42 percent above the national average for energy, and that’s even higher here in Aroostook County, so we simply have to address it,” said LePage.

LePage referred to the education system as broken. “We’re still number one at the secondary level, but we’re 22 in the world at K-12,” said LePage. “We will be addressing choice [such as charter schools] and major changes in how we educate.” To determine those changes, they looked this summer at the ten top countries in the world to see what they are doing, particularly Canada—which is ranked 4th. He wants to see more professional development for teachers, as well as more challenging curriculum and more vocational training opportunities for students.

In addition to making changes in education and energy with hopes of improving the economy, LePage plans to work with a zero based budget. According to LePage, they are currently evaluating all state programs, and will be eliminating those with no benefit to society, consolidating where it is appropriate, and allowing for growth where needed.

The governor delivered his remarks in the residential construction lab at NMCC. The location was selected by College and LEAD officials to underscore the connection between higher education in the region and how the work of institutions like NMCC are preparing a well-trained workforce in the region and across Maine to advance the economy.

“Inside this space and across this campus we are preparing the future workforce that will propel our state forward. Whether that is through the training of men and women to lead the way in creating more energy efficient structures and in gaining expertise in new energy solutions or to fill highly technical positions in growing industries in Maine, such as metal manufacturing and healthcare, that innovation is happening right here,” said NMCC President Timothy Crowley in his welcoming remarks.

Crowley’s comments were echoed by LEAD President Jon McLaughlin, who both reflected on a quarter century of accomplishments by the non-profit organization and looked ahead to the next 25 years.

“LEAD has always been in the forefront advocating on issues that are of concern for the entire Aroostook County region. We have had a remarkable collaborative relationship with Northern Maine Community College, and we will continue this relationship by working to ensure that College is successful in their endeavor to train the workforce of the future. The educational services they provide are necessary to keep our County moving forward,” said McLaughlin.

Officials with LEAD and NMCC had invited LePage to be part of a joint event to mark the respective anniversaries and the ongoing efforts of both organizations shortly after his election last fall. The event was planned, in part, to recognize the long-standing collaborative relationship between the two organizations.

NMCC was established five decades ago when then Maine Governor John H. Reed signed a bill into law that created the higher education institution. A quarter-century later, a prominent group of Aroostook County business leaders turned to then Northern Maine Vocational Technical Institute, to ask the school to serve as the base of operations for a brand new organization they incorporated called LEADers Encouraging Aroostook Development.

LEAD, Inc., a non-profit corporation of community volunteers, was established in 1986 for the purpose of fostering and encouraging the balanced development of Aroostook County, which includes focus on the economy, jobs, image, partnerships, promotion of new and existing businesses, natural resources, and legislation.

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Governor Paul LePage speaks to a group of 100 business leaders from Aroostook County during a breakfast on October 7 co-sponsored by Leaders Encouraging Aroostook Development and Northern Maine Community College in the College's residential construction lab.