



Maine Community College System

NEWS RELEASE

EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE UNTIL
Thursday, November 16, 2006, 11 a.m.

CONTACT: Helen Pelletier
Phone: 207-767-0116, ext. 3
Cell: 207-215-4652
hpelletier@mccs.me.edu

NR06067A

Governor's Community College Advisory Council Calls for Dramatic Growth in Maine's Community Colleges

Maine's community college system is the smallest in the nation. Council of business, labor, and economic development leaders calls for \$20.3 million investment to increase the state's capacity to meet growing demand for skilled workers.

SOUTH PORTLAND AND PRESQUE ISLE, ME — The state must make major new investments in its community colleges to ensure that Maine people and businesses have the skills they need to compete in a rapidly changing and increasingly global economy. That's one of the findings of the Governor's Community College Advisory Council (GCCAC), an independent advisory group of Maine leaders representing business, economic development, and organized labor.

The Advisory Council—including Leon Gorman of LL Bean, Dana Connors of the Maine State Chamber of Commerce, and Joanna Jones, Director of Human Resources for Education Development Center, Inc.—presented its findings and recommendations to Governor John Baldacci at a meeting today at Southern Maine Community College. A public unveiling of the plan was also held at Northern Maine Community College in Presque Isle. That event was led by GCCAC member Kris Doody Chabre, CEO of Cary Medical Center in Caribou and NMCC President Timothy Crowley.

Charged by Governor John Baldacci with examining Maine's future workforce and educational demands and the capacity of the state's seven community colleges to meet those demands, the GCCAC determined that Maine's four-year old community college system is not large enough to meet the needs of students and business. Noting that the system is the smallest in the nation, the Council calls for a major expansion to address a serious, existing shortage of skilled workers in the state and an ever growing demand for the education and training programs offered by the colleges.

The group's report, entitled *Jobs and Opportunities: The Power and Potential of Maine's Community Colleges*, calls for achieving the national average in community college enrollment—a total of 30,000 credit students for a state of Maine's size—within ten years.

To that end, it calls for an initial State investment of \$20.3 million to enable 4,000 additional students to enroll in the community colleges and bring credit enrollment to around 17,000. The Council also recommends a major capital improvements bond issue to update and expand facilities at the seven colleges.

In presenting the group's findings and recommendations to Governor Baldacci, Joanna Jones, co-chair of the GCCAC, stressed that while enrollment of degree seeking students has grown by 47 percent in the four years since the community colleges were established, state funding has increased by only ten percent. "Our state's community colleges offer an affordable, accessible, and efficient pathway to higher education for thousands of Maine people," Jones said. "Now, Maine needs to turn this pathway into a multi-lane highway."

In accepting the report, Governor Baldacci, who led efforts to create the community college system in Maine in 2003, called them one of "Maine's great success stories."

In advocating for an expanded community college system, the Council stressed that in an economy increasingly driven by knowledge and technology, Maine is educating far too few of its citizens. It noted that:

- Only 37 percent of Mainers between the ages of 25 and 64 hold a college degree, compared with the New England average of 46 percent.
- Only 49 percent of Maine high school students enrolled in college within 12 months of graduating from high school in 2004, the lowest college going rate in New England.
- More than 2/3rds of the new jobs being created in our economy are in occupations that require some kind of post-secondary education.

The Council also stressed that good paying jobs with good benefits already exist in Maine and are going unfilled because of a lack of skilled workers. Among its key findings:

- Maine's community colleges—and other schools in the state offering similar programs—are training only about one-third of the workers needed to meet the skilled employment needs of many of Maine's largest industries through the year 2012.

In discussing the Advisory Council's findings, Leon Gorman, Chairman of the Board at L.L. Bean, noted: "At L.L. Bean, we pride ourselves in strategically positioning our company to be successful in this new economic era. Our success, more than ever, depends on an educated workforce. And we are not alone. Maine employers in every corner of this great state are in need of high skilled workers. The work of this Council proved to me that Maine's seven community colleges are at the heart of that solution."

The Council also stressed the need for the state to align its economic and workforce development efforts. It noted that the success of Maine's investments in research and development will be hampered if the workforce side of the equation is not addressed. "Strategic investments in a high-skilled workforce are critical to business expansion and job creation and central to the success of R&D efforts," the Council wrote.

In recommending substantial new investments in the community colleges, the Governor's Advisory Council identified the following five priorities:

- Support for both occupational and transfer missions of the MCCS.
- Affordable access, including keeping community college tuition affordable for low- and moderate-income citizens and increasing funds for scholarships.
- Convenient geographic access.
- Help for more high school students go to college.
- Customized training to more Maine employers and expanded offerings to support entrepreneurship.

In 2003, Maine became the 48th state in the nation to establish a community college system. The system is comprised of seven colleges across the state: Southern Maine Community College (South Portland), Northern Maine Community College (Presque Isle), Central Maine Community College (Auburn), Eastern Maine Community College (Bangor), Washington County Community College (Calais), Kennebec Valley Community College (Fairfield), and York County Community College (Wells).

Since the Legislature changed the name and mission of the former technical colleges in 2003, enrollment has grown dramatically, with over 11,000 degree seeking students enrolled in the fall of 2006. In all, more than 13,000 students are enrolled in credit courses at one of the seven colleges this semester.

The Governor's Community College Advisory Council met five times between March and July 2006. Their meetings included presentations by representatives of Maine business and industry; government leaders including the state economist and the commissioners of education and economic and community development; the chancellor of the University of Maine System; MCCS staff; and others. The Advisory Council's work was supported by research conducted by the State Planning Office, MCCS staff, and Strategic Marketing Services of Portland.

Members of the GCCAC included:

- Kris Doody Chabre, Chief Executive Officer, Cary Medical Center, Caribou;
- Dana Connors, President, Maine State Chamber of Commerce, Augusta;
- Brett Doney, former President/Chief Executive Officer, Enterprise Maine, South Paris;
- Christopher Evans, President, Sabre Yachts, South Casco;
- Edward Gorham, President, Maine AFL/CIO, Augusta;
- Leon Gorman, Chairman of the Board, L.L. Bean, Inc., Yarmouth;
- Timothy Hussey, President/Chief Executive Officer, Hussey Seating Co., South Berwick;
- Joanna Jones, Director of Human Resources, Education Development Center, Inc., and Member, MCCS Board of Trustees, Waldoboro (GCCAC co-chair);
- Thomas Palmer, General Manager, Lafayette Hotels, Orono (GCCAC co-chair)
- Cynthia Phinney, Business Manager, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW-1837), and Member, MCCS Board of Trustees, Manchester;
- Dianne Tilton, former Executive Director, Sunrise County Economic Council, Machias; and
- Bruce Tisdale, President, Mountain Machine Works, Auburn.

The report is available on-line at www.mccs.me.edu.

#####