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Maine Women's Lobby Staff

Maine Women's Lobby

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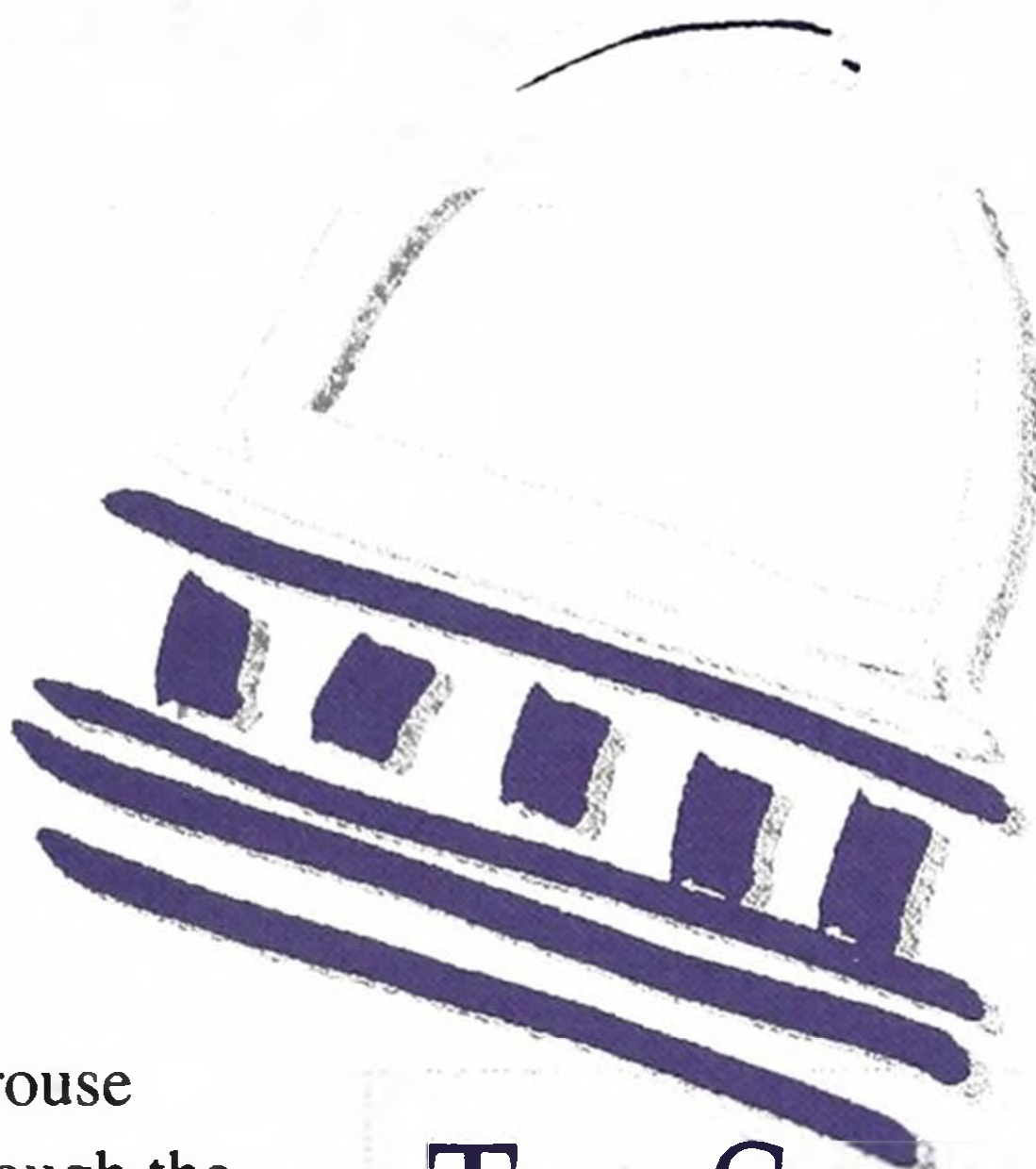
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THE TOPIC OF TAXES

by Lisa Pohlmann, Research Associate,
Maine Center for Economic Policy and
Board Member of MWL and WDI

The topic of taxes does not often arouse much lively debate among women, even though the impact of taxation policy is felt by every woman. From the rate of our Maine sales tax on the goods we purchase, to the income tax withheld from our paychecks, to the property taxes paid either as homeowners or, through the amount of our rent, by our landlords, we are all participating in revenue generation for services that our state and local municipalities provide.

Within the framework of generating enough revenue to meet the collective needs identified by citizens for state and local budgets, there are many complex decisions to be made about taxes. Among them are equity (who pays and how much?); stability (will there be enough revenue flow from the mix of all sources?); what is taxed and how does that affect the economy (will we tax only goods or also services which make up a growing part of our economy?); will we tax pollution, entertainment, cigarettes and who will that burden fall on?); how the impacts of taxes on the state and local levels play out together (how does the repeal of one shift the burden of the other?) And, always, the size of the revenue base needed is dependent on the amount of the specific expenditures we collectively decide to make such as health care for our elderly parents or ourselves, roads and bridges, schools for our children, emergency assistance in response to economic hardship and so on. (continued on page 2)



a publication of the MAINE WOMEN'S LOBBY

THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN MAINE

Condensed by Kimberly Simmons, WDI volunteer

On November 21, 1996, the Women's Development Institute and 11 other women's organizations, released a report entitled The Status of Women in Maine, at the Women, Work, and Community Center in South Portland. Maine Senator Chellie Pingree (D) and Jane Amero (R) attended and fielded questions about the report's findings from the audience, which included women enrolled in a special training program at Women, Work, and Community, representatives of coalition partners involved in producing the report, and the media. Throughout the end of November and December, similar sessions were held at Women, Work, and Community centers around the state.

The report is the result of a national project completed by the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR). Most of the findings in the report come from government data sources, such as the department of labor statistics and the United States Census. IWP, led by renowned economist Heidi Hartman, is a nonpartisan research organization designed to provide useful policy analysis and empirical data on issues concerning women.

The Status of Women in Maine provides us with information about women's political and economic status, as well as women's reproductive freedoms and general health. Most importantly, the data allows comparisons between women and men in Maine and between women in Maine and women in other states in New England and across the country. The report clearly dispels any myths about contemporary equity between men and women, in Maine or nationwide. (A brief summary of key findings is located on page 4)

(THE TOPIC OF TAXES - FROM PAGE 1)

Let's look at the Governor's proposed budget for the biennium. Beginning with an estimated \$433 million shortfall projected early on for the biennium, the Governor is requesting a repeal of the income tax cap passed by the last legislature because, he asserts, failure to do so would require passing some, if not all, of the revenue loss on to municipalities. Beyond that, the budget is a series of tucks and squeezes to reduce costs enough to both fit new spending and compensate for the loss of the revenue caused by the repeal of the hospital and nursing home taxes, also in the last legislature.

The most substantial pieces of proposed new state spending are over \$30 million in teacher retirement and \$16 million for 1% and 2% increases in general purpose aid to education. Other new spending includes \$12 million to fund the modest state employee contracts (partially balanced by projected savings of \$5 million in employee health care due, in part, to managed care); an additional \$8 million in corrections; almost \$7 million to provide mere 1% and 2% increases to the university system, technical colleges, and Maine Maritime Academy; and \$5 million to increase foster care payments.

Will there be enough funds overall to meet the expenditures committed by the state and take care offset cuts which may be shifted to the local level? For some time, there have been strong feelings among some citizens that property taxes have been rising too quickly and must be stopped. A citizen petition for a property tax cap has been organized though it has not as of this writing acquired the needed signatures to become legislation. Even for those who are less adamant about this topic, there may be cause for concern about potentially serious burdens on municipalities and counties. This is felt most obviously in school budgets. Prior to this administration, state school funding has been flat for four years. The effect has been that, despite sharp increases in local spending to try to keep up with inflation, spending on resources such as books, equipment and nonacademic personnel fell substantially while costs for teachers rose primarily because of health insurance premiums. The ill effects fell differently on different districts, with those who are most dependent on state support feeling most hurt by the state's failure to increase funds. The increases of 2% and 3% in the last biennium made modest improvements in this situation, but educators express concern about likely shortfalls in the next two years.

Others options? If the 6% sales tax were extended to all kinds of services -- including personal services (like hair-dressing and cleaners), amusements and recreations (like movies, concerts and ski tickets), professional services (like lawyers and accountants), business services (like printing and

couriers), and construction services (like general and electrical contractors) -- the total raised would be about \$122 million in fiscal year 1999, or close to 10% of total property tax revenues. Increasing the sales tax base also increases stability during economic fluctuations when consumers purchase differently.

Although the call for tax caps has been popular with some, overall tax relief could mean very different amounts of relief to taxpayers in different situations. Such general across-the-board relief could either be replaced or supplemented by additional state relief targeted to households and communities with the greatest need. Examples of this have been proposed in legislation by the recently convened Commission to Study Poverty among Working Parents. They include the state Earned Income Credit modeled as a percentage of the Federal tax credit which could assist many low-income working mothers; strengthening rather than the proposed \$7 million decrease in the Maine Residents Property Tax Relief Program which offers refunds to low income and elderly (primarily female) property owners; and raising the threshold for tax filing to those with incomes of at least \$10,000.

Some of the burden could also be shifted to businesses who now enjoy various tax credits and incentives which in the end, cost taxpayers money through lost revenue. The Governor is proposing to withdraw the Investment Tax credit which will bring approximately \$20 million in revenues. The long list of such "tax expenditures" could be even more finely combed.

The trade-offs are difficult and require debates that are broad in both social conscience and realism. This provides an opportunity for input from women who are used to balancing tight budgets, providing necessary services, taking in diverse needs, and offering creative solutions.

For more information on current state budget issues, Maine Choices 1997 is available for \$17.00 from the Maine Center for Economic Policy, Tel: 622-7381, Fax: 622-3731, E-mail: mcep@mint.net

25TH ANNIVERSARY MOVING

The Family Planning Association is celebrating its 25th anniversary by moving! FPA is developing a new Institute for Reproductive Health, dedicated to research and training to ensure access to a full range of reproductive health services for women in Central Maine. Call 622-7524 for more information.

LEGISLATION TO WATCH:

Thanks to our loyal members, the Lobby is able to retain a full-time lobbyist, our Executive Director, Laura Fortman, at the State House.

Economic Justice:

All of these bills have been targeted for support by MWL's Legislative Committee. Many of these bills were recommended by the State Commission to Study Poverty Among Working Parents (CSPAWP), of which MWL was a member.

L.D. 329 A Resolve Directing the Commissioner of Labor to Implement the Recommendations of the CSPAWP with Regard to Pay Discrimination Based on Gender. Sponsor: Rep. Povich (D-Ellsworth). Labor. Directs the commissioner of Labor to adopt rules to implement the provisions of the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 26, section 628 prohibiting discrimination in pay on the basis of gender.

L.D. 330 A Resolve to Implement the Recommendations of the CSPAWP with Regard to Microenterprise Needs. Sponsor: Rep. Povich (D-Ellsworth). Business and Economic Development. Requires the Department of Economic and Community Development to report to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over business and economic development matters on the needs of entrepreneurship in the State, microloans, microenterprise and small business needs.

L.D. 331 An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the CSPAWP with Regard to a Living Wage in State Subcontracted Work. Sponsor: Rep. Povich (D-Ellsworth). State and Local Government. Requires state contracts and subcontracts for personal services pay wages of at least \$11.54 per hour in direct compensation and provide indirect compensation in the form of health and retirement benefits.

L.D. 332 A Resolve to Implement the Recommendation of the CSPAWP with Regard to Unemployment Compensation. Sponsor: Rep. Povich (D-Ellsworth). Labor. Directs the Commissioner of Labor to study the unemployment compensation program.

L.D. 333 An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the CSPAWP with Regard to Child Care Funding. Sponsor Rep. Povich (D-Ellsworth). Health and Human Services. Appropriates \$500,000 each year of biennium for child care services to qualifying parents needing child care in order to work during the afternoon, evening or weekends.

L.D. 334 A Resolve to Implement the Recommendations of the CSPAWP with Regard to an Annual Report Card on Poverty. Sponsor: Rep. Povich (D-Ellsworth). Health and Human Services. Requires the Executive Department, State Planning Office to report annually to the Legislature on the subject of poverty in the State.

L.D. 564 An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the CSPAWP with Regard to State Earned Income Tax Credit. Sponsor: Rep. Povich (D-Ellsworth). Taxation. Establishes a Maine earned income tax credit (EITC) for low-income families. The credit is 20% of the federal EITC for families below 100% of the federal poverty level, 15% for families between 100% and 133% of the federal poverty level and 10% for families between 133% and 185% of the federal poverty level.

L.D. 168 An Act to Amend the Eligibility Requirements for Collecting Unemployment Benefits. Sponsor: Sen. Butland (R-Cumberland). Labor. Permits an individual whose entitlement to unemployment benefits is based on part-time employment to limit her/his job search to part time employment and remain eligible for unemployment benefits.

L.D. 445 An Act to Assist Low-Income Working Parents. Sponsor: Rep. Mitchell (D-Portland). Health and Human Services. Assists families in their transition from welfare to work by allowing AFDC recipients to receive some amount of financial assistance until their earnings are sufficient to meet their basic needs.

Family Planning and Reproductive Choice

MWL's Legislative Committee has voted to strongly oppose all of these bills.

L.D. 4 An Act to Preserve the Life of Viable Fetuses. Sponsor: Rep. Ahearne (D-Madawaska). Judiciary. Requires 2 physicians be present during an abortion and that it be performed in a manner best calculated to preserve the life of the fetus.

L.D. 57 An Act to Strengthen the Laws Governing the Failure to Preserve the Life of a Live-Born Person. Sponsor: Rep. Ahearne (D-Madawaska). Judiciary. Repeals physicians' good medical practice guidelines in cases of abortion and imposes more restrictive language.

L.D. 535 An Act to Ban Partial Birth Abortions. Sponsor: Rep. Ahearne (D-Madawaska). Judiciary. Bans a particular abortion procedure and makes performing the procedure a Class C crime unless it is necessary to save the life of the mother, thereby eliminating health and future fertility as medical considerations. Physician performing the abortion is subject to damages in a civil suit.

L.D. 122 An Act to Repeal the Funding for the Family Planning Association of Maine (FPA-Maine). Sponsor: Rep. Mack (R-Standish). Health and Human Services. Prohibits the Department of Human Services from providing funds to FPA-Maine.

L.D. 441 An Act to Prohibit Family Planning Agencies from Using State Funds for Certain Expenses Related to Abortion Services. Sponsor: Rep. Ahearne (D-Madawaska). Health and Human Services. Prohibits the use of state funds for construction or rent payments for facilities at which abortion services are provided or to fund abortions or abortion referral services.

L.D. 490 An Act to Require a 24-hour Waiting Period before an Abortion May Be Performed. Sponsor: Rep. Ahearne (D-Madawaska). Judiciary. Repeals existing standards for informed consent and replaces them with a required 24-hour waiting period.

L.D. 491 An Act to Require Parental Notification for Minors Seeking Abortions. Sponsor: Rep. Ahearne (D-Madawaska). Judiciary. Requires parental notification before an abortion is performed or induced on pregnant minor. Minor may notify other qualified relative or seek court approval if in fear of abusive response from parent.

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LEGISLATION TO WATCH (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3)

Healthcare:

L.D. 351 An Act to Decrease Infectious Disease Transmission. Sponsor: Rep. Mitchell (D-Portland). Judiciary. Removes criminal penalties for furnishing or possession of 10 or fewer hypodermic apparatuses and for the furnishing of any number of hypodermic apparatuses as a component of a Bureau of Health-certified needles exchange program to reduce transmission of HIV, Hepatitis C and other infectious diseases.

L.D. 402 An Act to Amend the Family Medical Leave Laws. Sponsor: Sen. LaFountain (D-York). Labor. Conforms certain definitions in the State's family medical leave laws to definitions in the federal Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993, and increases penalties for employers who fail to comply with these laws.

Violence Against Women and Children:

L.D. 365 An Act to Require That Public Schools Adopt a Conflict Resolution Model. Sponsor: Rep. Winglass (R-Auburn). Education and Cultural Affairs. Requires public elementary and secondary schools to implement comprehensive peer mediation and conflict resolution programs, to teach students alternative methods of handling situations without use of violence.

L.D. 36 An Act to Criminalize Certain Photographing of Children. Sponsor: Sen. Small (R-Sagadahoc). Criminal Justice. Establishes the Class D crime of visual exploitation of a child, which is the photographing or video recording of a child for the purpose of arousing or gratifying sexual desire.

ROCKEFELLER FAMILY FUND GIVES GENEROUSLY

The Rockefeller Family Fund gives generously to the Women's Development Institute. An award was granted to WDI in December 1996 to support our work in educating and training Maine women on policy issues.

THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN MAINE: KEY FINDINGS

Condensed by Kimberly C. Simmons

DEMOGRAPHICS:

Maine's total population is 1,236,000.

The median age of women in Maine is 34.9 years; 15.5% of Maine women are over age 65.

98% of Maine women are white, compared to 75.9% of women nationwide.

Women comprise 3.9% of the Federal and State prison population in Maine.

POLITICS:

Maine is a national leader, ranking 4th in the nation in women's political participation.

Women hold just over 25% of the state legislative positions.

Maine ranks 40th in the country for providing women in politics with institutional resources; Maine has no Commission on Women or Legislative Caucus for Women.

EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMICS:

More Maine women complete high school than women nationwide.

The proportion of women in Maine with some college, or a college degree is lower than the national average.

Employment opportunities for women in Maine are about average nationally, but rank lowest in New England.

Women have fewer opportunities to earn a living wage than do men; most women in Maine earn \$0.69 for every \$1.00 a Maine man earns.

The median annual earnings for Maine women is \$16,540, men in Maine earn an average of \$24,000. Nationally, women earn an average of \$18,780 and men earn \$27,430.

12.3% of women in Maine live in poverty; 41.6% of single mothers live below the poverty threshold.

REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM & WOMEN'S HEALTH:

11.4% of Maine women do not have any health insurance (as compared to 13.5% of Maine men, 13.8% of women nationwide and 17.8% of men nationwide).

Women in Maine are less likely to have health insurance than in any other New England state, except New Hampshire. Maine has no plans for universal health insurance.

Maine women enjoy more reproductive freedom than women in 34 other states, however, we rank 5th out of 6 in New England.

50% of counties in Maine have at least one abortion provider, compared to 16% of counties nationwide.

The fertility rate of women in Maine is significantly lower than women across the country, as are infant mortality rates and the % of babies born with low birth weights.

The rate of teen mothering is lower in Maine than nationally 10.2% of all births in Maine compared to 12.7% of all births nationally).

BLACK & WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTHS

Challenging us to think about the connections between gender, race, and public policy
by Kim Simmons

Black History Month occurs in February; Women's History Month follows in March. These months serve multiple purposes. First, Black and women's history months challenge Americans to consider our racist and sexist heritages, to learn about the particular stories of African-Americans and women, and to consider the continuing struggles of women and people of color in the United States. Black and women's history months highlight the too-often ignored contributions of marginalized groups to American culture and Western civilization; these months bring book displays, lectures, arts, and special events featuring African-Americans and women into our local communities.

At their best, Black History and Women's History months push us to understand race and gender in America in complicated terms - as aspects of personal and cultural identity, and as political, structural, and institutionalized phenomena. Yet, all too often these months result in the continued ghettoization of race from gender. This partitioning of race from gender (and from class) has, throughout history, frustrated the collective action of women, people of color, and poor people. Furthermore, as Gloria Hull, Patricia Bell-Scott, and Barbara Smith's book "All the Blacks are Men, all the Women are White, But Some of Us are Brave" makes clear, too often civil rights and feminist work ignores or rejects women of color. In this year

of legislative decisions which disproportionately impact white women and women and men of color, we need to move toward a coalitional understanding and politic of gender, race and class.

Contemporary feminists activists and theorists protest the segmentation of race and gender. Most now argue that we cannot understand race, class, and gender as separate; instead, what it means to be black in America also depends on gender (black men and black women share a racial identity but experience it differently due to gender and racism). Finally, identities are not static. As the essayist June Jordan points out in "notes from the Bahamas," what it means to occupy a particular racial, gender, and class identity depends in part on context; for example, what it means for her to be an African-American women professor is different in a department of white men than it is as a privileged tourist in the Bahamas.

The Maine Women's Lobby mission emphasizes "optimizing the lives of women and girls in Maine." This mission includes working toward social justice in Maine for all people, because it is clear that the liberation of women depends on fundamental social change. The battles over welfare reform in particular, include a gendered, raced, and classed subtext which cannot be ignored! We hope that during these months which promote an understanding of the historical struggles and remarkable triumphs of African-Americans and Women that we can move, as a state, to a political stance which promotes social justice for everyone.

Suggested Readings on the Subject

Black Feminist Thought, by Patricia Hill Collins, Routledge 1990. Collins provides a theoretical foundation for understanding race, class, and gender as part of a larger "matrix" of identity and social structure. She also provides a strong argument for understanding the construction of identity-groups on the basis of shared historical and social experiences rather than biological conditions.

Black Women in White America: A Documentary History, edited by Gerda Lerner, Vintage Books, 1982. Lerner assembles the writings of African-American women from 1811 to 1971. She organizes the writings chronologically and in thematic categories, tracing the history of black women in white America, in their own voices. Lerner, a noted feminists historian, also provides useful context and analysis of the writings.

I've Known Rivers: Lives of Loss and Liberation, by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, Penguin Books, 1994. This collection of personal narratives investigates the lives of six professional African-Americans; the narratives testify to the importance of understanding racial identity as important and separate from class, yet equally as connected and constituted by gender, class and historical time.

Racial Formation in the United States: from the 1960s to the 1990s, by Michael Omi and Howard Winant, Routledge: 1994. This book provides insight into the ways that racial categories are socially constructed - not biological -- and investigates the usefulness of such categories for both dominant and minority groups.

Newsletter design and layout
★ donated by **Laura Hudson** ★

ISSUE REPORT: LATE TERM ABORTIONS

In its landmark 1973 Roe vs. Wade decision, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that abortion is a constitutional right of all women. The majority of people in this country, in poll after poll, agreed that it is a woman's right to choose abortion. However, a loud minority works every day to deny women our reproductive freedom.

The term "partial-birth" abortion is not a medical term, but a part of the exploitation by religious and political extremists of a very painful time in women's lives. In fact, late term abor-

tions are quite rare and are in response to serious medical complications which threaten the life or health of the mother or in cases of severe fetal anomalies. The choice to terminate these pregnancies in the second and third trimester involves medical, emotional and spiritual issues. Those issues should remain the province of a woman and her physician.

PUBLIC HEARING DATES:

March 5

Anti-Choice Bills, Augusta Civic Center 1:00 pm

March 24

Economic Security Bills, State Office Building Rm 113 9:00 am



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"Optimizing the lives of Maine women and girls through public policy development and legislative action."