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Maine Women's Lobby

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THE LOBBYIST

SPRING 2000

Number 29

Right: Laura Fortman and a Women Unlimited class that rallied for equal pay on May 11th.



Left: Sen. Neria Douglass and Sen. Anne Rand show their support for pay equity at the press conference.



a publication of the
**MAINE
WOMEN'S
LOBBY**
and the Women's
Development Institute

MWL AND ALLIES RALLY FOR EQUAL PAY

Maine women ask, "Where's my 27 cents?"

In commemoration of Equal Pay Day the Maine Women's Lobby organized a rally and press conference at the State House on May 11th to highlight how the wage gap impacts Maine women and their families. Equal Pay Day marks the point - four months into the new year - when women's earnings finally equal what men earned the previous year. On a national level, women earn only 73 cents for each dollar a man earns, according to the National Committee on Pay Equity. That's nearly \$9,500 less than men in annual pay. Even more startling, that number is down from 74 cents in 1998 and 76 cents in 1997.

Since Equal Pay Day coincided with "Veto Day" -- the day the legislature votes to uphold or override Governor King's vetoes of particular bills -- activity at the State House was particularly lively. Program Assistant Liz Keith and intern Krista Haapala staffed a resource table in the Hall of Flags and gathered signatures for our "Pledge to Help Eliminate the Wage Gap." In addition to the flyers and fact sheets on the issue, the table offered an edible portrayal of the wage gap - chocolate chip cookies with a bite taken out of them to symbolize the gap in women's earnings. Dozens of legislators, activists, and other visitors to the State House drawn to the table because of the cookies found they got a bite-sized piece of education about the wage gap along with their delicious snack!

At the press conference, MWL Executive Director Laura Fortman was joined by Sen. Neria Douglass, co-chair of the Labor Committee, Senate President Mark Lawrence, Maine Human Rights Commission Executive Director Patricia Ryan

and Maine AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer Ned McCann in calling for an end to pay discrimination on the basis of gender or race. The speakers were flanked by a cadre of supporters, including Assistant Senate Majority Leader Anne Rand, members of the SEIU, and a Women Unlimited class.

Laura Fortman refuted the claim by some critics that wage discrimination does not exist. "The wage gap is affected by many factors, including a woman's race, age, education, occupation and geographic region - there's much more to it than 'women's choices.' The bottom line is that pay discrepancies do exist, and the price tag for that inequality is huge."

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, many women work for low pay and are the sole providers for their families. Consequently, it is no surprise that 3.5 million (27 %) of all families headed by women were below the poverty line in 1998.

"Working women deserve equal pay," said Ned McCann. "It is our belief that organizing a union is still the most effective way to achieve equal pay. Equal pay is not just a working women's issue, it's a working families' issue." According to the AFL-CIO's Working Women's Department, women union members earned 40% more than nonunion women in 1997.

"Pay equity issues, while not always in the forefront, are nonetheless existent today, and require strong enforcement of the statutes which prohibit such discrimination," added Patricia Ryan of the Maine Human Rights Commission.

The observance of Pay Equity Day is coordinated annually by the National Committee on Pay Equity (NCPE) in Washington, DC, a broad-based coalition of nearly 600 organizations working to end sex- and race-based bias in pay. A special thanks to baker extraordinaire Ann Kaplan for providing the delicious - and educational -- cookies!

The following is a brief summary of the content and status of a few bills the Lobby worked on during the second session of the 119th legislature. Our support ranged from merely monitoring bills to organizing public hearings and activating our members to contact their legislators. Bills that have been signed by the Governor at press time have a Public Law (PL) number in front of them. Most bills that were passed will take effect 90 days after the Governor signs them. Emergency bills, such as the budget, take effect immediately. For more information on any of the bills below, call our offices at 622-0851.

Ballot Language, November 7, 2000

"Do you favor ratifying the action of the 119th Legislature whereby it passed an act extending to all citizens regardless of their sexual orientation the same basic rights to protection against discrimination now guaranteed to citizens on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin in the areas of employment, housing, public accommodation and credit and where the act expressly stated that nothing in the act confers legislative approval of, or special rights to, any person or group of persons?"

Civil Rights

PL 629: An Act to Ensure Civil Rights and Prevent Discrimination. Sponsor: Senator Abromson (R-Cumberland) In the spring of 1997, after a 20-year battle, the Maine legislature granted protection to all Maine citizens in employment, credit, public accommodation and housing regardless of their sexual orientation. Unfortunately, that law was overturned on Feb. 10, 1998 by a "people's veto". The legislature has once again passed a bill prohibiting discrimination in these areas. There is a referendum provision attached to the bill (language appears above) and now the bill goes to the people for final ratification Nov. 7, 2000. Remember-this time we will be voting "YES!" to support these basic rights!

PL 613: An Act Concerning Offensive Names. Sponsor: Rep. Soctomah (Passamaquoddy) This bill amended Maine's law prohibiting the use of offensive names by adding the word "squaw" to the list of offensive place names and prohibiting its use to designate "any natural geographic feature or any street, alley, or other road...or any political subdivision of the State." **Status:** Enacted.

Economic Security

Increasing the Minimum Wage

Once again the legislature, with bi-partisan support, approved bills to increase the minimum wage and once again, the Governor did not support those bills. A recent study by the Institute for Women's Policy Research and the Economic Policy Institute in Washington, D.C. indicated that increasing the minimum wage to \$6.15/hr. would benefit approximately 36,000 working women in Maine.

L.D. 357: An Act Raising the Minimum Wage. Sponsor: Rep. Hatch (D-Skowhegan). This bill would send increasing the minimum wage out to be voted on by the people in a referendum. **Status:** Vetoed.

L.D. 1262: An Act to Increase the Minimum Wage in Maine. Sponsor: Sen. Pingree (D-Knox). This bill would have increased the minimum wage by \$.70 in .35 increments over a 2-year period. **Status:** This bill was not signed by Governor and the legislature has adjourned -- in effect this is a "pocket veto" which means that the Governor has killed the bill.

P.L. 705: An Act to Increase Access to High Quality Jobs through the Workforce Investment Act. Sponsor: Senator Douglass (D-Androscoggin) This bill states that a person in training under the Workforce Investment Act is deemed to be in approved training for purposes of qualifying for unemployment benefits, but provides that the law is not effective if inconsistent with federal law. **Status:** Enacted.

L.D. 2516: An Act to Improve Standards for Public Assistance to Maine Employers Sponsor: Senator Pingree (D- Knox) The purpose of this "living wage" bill was to establish additional standards for the delivery of Maine's limited tax resources for economic development purposes. Employers receiving more than \$10,000 per year in tax breaks through such programs as Tax Increment Financing or Business Equipment Tax Refund would have been required to pay a higher minimum wage. **Status:** Vetoed.

PL 637: An Act to Remove Barriers to Adequate Transportation for Low Income Working Parents. Sponsor: Rep. McGlocklin (D. -Emden). This bill allows low-income families with children to have one car, regardless of value, and still qualify for food stamp benefits even if they do not receive cash assistance from TANF. **Status:** Enacted

L.D. 103 An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Study Poverty Among Working Parents with Regard to State Earned Income Credit. Sponsors: Rep. Povich (D.-Ellsworth) and Sen. Dagget (D. Kennebec) This establishes a State Earned Income Tax Credit of 5% of the federal Earned Income Tax Credit. The credit is non-refundable, which means it does not apply to individuals whose income is too low to pay state taxes. **Status:** Funded in the Budget.

PL 740: An Act to Establish a Method of Determining Employer Contributions to the Unemployment Compensation Trust Fund. Sponsor: Sen. Douglass (D- Androscoggin) This puts in place a mechanism to ensure that the Unemployment Insurance Fund will remain solvent during a recession when there is the greatest demand on the UI program. It also requires that whenever

unemployment compensation benefit changes are proposed, the Dept. of Labor shall complete a review and evaluation of the impact of those changes on the experience rating of the employers as well as the impact on the recipient groups. **Status:** Enacted.

Health

L.D. 1477: An Act to Promote Healthy Maine Families. Sponsor: Sen. Pingree (D-Knox). This expands Medicaid coverage to nearly 10,500 parents in families with incomes under 150% of the federal poverty level--\$20,820 for a family of 3. **Status:** It was funded in the Budget using tobacco settlement funds.

Resolve 129: Resolve, to Implement the Recommendations Contained in the Report Women's Health: An Action Plan for Maine (formerly: An Act to Establish an Office of Women's Health.) Sponsor: Senator Mitchell (R-Penobscot) Rep. Judy Powers (D. Rockport) There was not "ongoing" money available to create an office of women's health. However, due to efforts of Appropriations committee member, Rep. Judy Powers, \$200,000 in one-time funding from the Dept. of Human services was secured to implement the recommendations contained in the report "Women's Health an Action Plan for Maine". **Status:** Enacted.

PL 742: An Act to Establish a Patient's Bill of Rights. Sponsors: Rep. Jane Saxl and Sen. Lafountain. This bill allows patients to hold their HMOs accountable for poor health care treatment decisions. It also allows a pregnant woman to continue seeing her OB/GYN even if her insurance company does not renew its contract with the physician. **Status:** Enacted.

PL 702: An Act to Protect the Health and Well-Being of Nursing Infants and Divorcing Parents. Sponsor: Sen. Cathcart (D-Penobscot) This directs a judge, when determining custody, to consider breast feeding in the list of factors when assessing the best interests of a child under 1 year old. This does not create a presumption in favor of the mother but merely insures that breastfeeding will be considered, along with other factors, when determining the best interests of the child. **Status:** Enacted.

PL 786: An Act to Establish Fairer Pricing for Prescription Drugs. Sponsor: Sen. Pingree (D-Knox) Passage of this landmark legislation was accomplished through compromise and cooperation between the bill sponsor, support from bi-partisan leadership and the Governor. This bill will: 1.) create the Maine Rx Program which will utilize manufacturer rebates and pharmacy discounts to reduce the cost of prescription drugs for Maine residents; 2.) establish a 12 member Prescription Drug Advisory Commission which advises the Commissioner of Human Services regarding access to prescription drugs; 3.) allow civil penalties if a company is found guilty of profiteering; 4.) authorize the State to negotiate and enter into purchasing alliances to help reduce prescription drug costs; and 5.) require manufacturers that participate in the Medicaid program to participate in the drug rebate program. **Status:** Enacted.

Freedom
from
Violence

P.L. 719 An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Propose an Alternative Process for Forensic Examinations for Sexual Assault Victims. Sponsor: Committee Bill. This directs the Victim's Compensation Board to pay for all forensic examinations conducted on or after Nov. 1, 2000. This also directs the Dept. of Public Safety to determine what a standardized forensic examination kit includes and to furnish the kits to hospitals and health care practitioners who perform forensic examinations of sexual assault survivors. **Status:** Enacted - Emergency.

PL 746: An Act to Increase the Number of Domestic Violence Prosecutors. Sponsor: Rep. Jabar (D-Waterville) Sen. Davis (R-Piscataquis) State funds for 8 special domestic violence prosecutors were appropriated in the budget. PL 746 creates a position for 1 special domestic violence prosecutor to be funded through a federal grant. It also requires the Attorney General to submit a report compiling data from domestic violence prosecutions to the legislature on an annual basis. The first report is due no later than October 1, 2001. **Status:** Enacted.

PL 659: An Act to Clarify Application of the Employment Leave Law for Victims of Violence. Sponsor: Rep. Hatch (D-Skowhegan) Last year we passed first in the nation legislation giving employment leave to victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking. Unfortunately, due to a technicality of where the law was placed in the statute, it was unclear if this new law applied to all employers. This now clearly states that the law applies to all businesses in Maine. **Status:** Enacted.

P.L. 639 : An Act Regarding the Statute of Limitations for Sexual Misconduct with a Minor. Sponsor: Rep. Dudley (D-Portland). This law provides that there is no statute of limitations for civil actions based on sexual acts toward minors that are based on sexual acts or sexual contact that either occurred after the effective date of this bill, or prior to the effective date but for which the existing statute of limitations had not yet expired on the effective date of this bill. This amendment does not revive any case for which the period under the statute of limitations has already expired. **Status:** Enacted.

Resolve 126: Resolve, to Establish the Commission to Study Domestic Violence. Sponsor: Rep. McAlevey (R- Waterboro) This resolve establishes a 19 person Commission to study the problem of domestic violence and determine methods of alleviating the problem, including: strengthening protection from abuse orders, increasing enforcement of probation and bail conditions and examining the handling of domestic violence cases from investigation to prosecution to movement through the court system. The Commission will also submit a report with recommendations to the Second Regular session of the 120th legislature no later than December 5, 2001. **Status:** Enacted - Emergency.

WOMEN'S VOICES 2000 INITIATIVE COMING TO MAINE

National survey will highlight the issues that matter most to women in the upcoming elections

This fall, the Women's Development Institute will be partnering with the Center for Policy Alternatives (CPA) to bring the results of the Women's Voices 2000 Initiative to Maine women. Women's Voices is a groundbreaking national polling effort to capture the values and priorities of American women in the public policy arena and to ensure that those priorities are key issues in the 2000 elections.

In 1992, CPA became the first group other than Virginia Slims to organize a national poll of women. In coordination with the Ms. Foundation for Women, CPA launched a bi-partisan, multicultural survey directed at women to discover their key concerns in women's own voices. CPA took this initiative one step further in 1996 by going directly to American women to ascertain their top priorities and their ideas for solutions. We believe that the findings from the 1996 poll had a direct impact on the 1996 elections. Voters, locally and nationally, were confronted with critical challenges such as access to child and elder care, pay equity, and adequate health care -- issues that were defined by women themselves in the 1996 survey.

Women's Voices 2000 builds on the success of the 1992 and 1996 efforts. This year's initiative will be expanded to include the voices of African American, Native American, Latina, Asian American and white women as well as young women and women

with low-incomes. Unlike most conventional polls, Women's 2000 will target all women, not just likely voters. The finding will look not only at the concerns of women today, but will also use the 1992 and 1996 data to examine trends on issues such as equal pay, violence in schools and the community, and balancing family and work.

By sharing the results of the Initiative with Maine women we hope to get a picture of how the concerns of Maine women compare with those raised by women across the country. It will also give Maine women a chance to help shape a common national agenda for women. Women's priorities are increasingly the priorities of American families, and women are taking a greater role in making sure those are the issues that get talked about. As we head into another major election year, Women's Voices 2000 will help us to ensure that the voices of Maine women are amplified in the public policy arena and set the agenda for the November elections. Look for more information about Women's Voice 2000 in our fall newsletter!

WDI RECEIVES GENEROUS GRANTS

The Women's Development Institute recently received a grant of \$5,000 from the Maine Women's Fund. This funding will provide much-needed support for general operating expenses over the summer months. The Haymarket People's Fund also granted WDI \$9,000, which will provide crucial funding for our efforts for pay equity in Maine. Thank you, MWF and Haymarket!

MWL SEEKING VISIONARY BOARD MEMBERS

Looking for a challenging, rewarding, and fun opportunity to help improve the lives of women in Maine? The Maine Women's Lobby is currently seeking nominees to fill several spots on our Board of Directors. Individuals who are willing to roll up their sleeves to help the Lobby become a more effective and vital voice for women are encouraged to apply. Just send us a brief letter of intent and your resume by July 1, 2000 or call the office at 622-0851 with any questions. Elections will take place at our annual meeting in September.

STRATEGIC PLANNING UPDATE

As we mentioned in our last newsletter, MWL/WDI received a strategic planning grant from the Rockefeller Family Fund in December. Last month, we hired Lael Stegall and Barrie Pribyl of Social Change International as consultants to guide us through this extraordinary opportunity to build stronger, more vital companion organizations. Together, Lael and Barrie bring a range of expertise to help us build our capacity and plan for future growth. They'll be joining our Board at a retreat in June to begin the planning process. We look forward to working with them during this challenging and exciting long-term organizational planning. We are committed to involving our members in this process and will keep you posted as we proceed!

The 2000 Girls' Day at the State House was sponsored by:

Duke Energy North America
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Thanks for your generous support!

GIRLS' DAY AT THE CAPITOL

by Melissa MacCrae

The State House opened its doors March 3 to welcome about 30 seventh- and eighth-grade girls from Eagle Lake to Kittery for a day dedicated to them. The consistent message they heard from Senate President Mark Lawrence, Senate Majority Leader Chellie Pingree, Senate Minority Leader Jane Amero, House Speaker Steven Rowe and other lawmakers was that the Legislature needs more women.

About a half-dozen women mentors volunteered to shepherd the students around the Capitol for Girls' Day at the State House, an annual event sponsored by the Women's Development Institute, a nonprofit organization based in Augusta. The girls were met with a cacophony of clanging bells and the rush of lawmakers clamoring down the hallways of the Capitol under construction. Yet they rose to the challenges they encountered throughout the day; their increasing confidence was tangible.

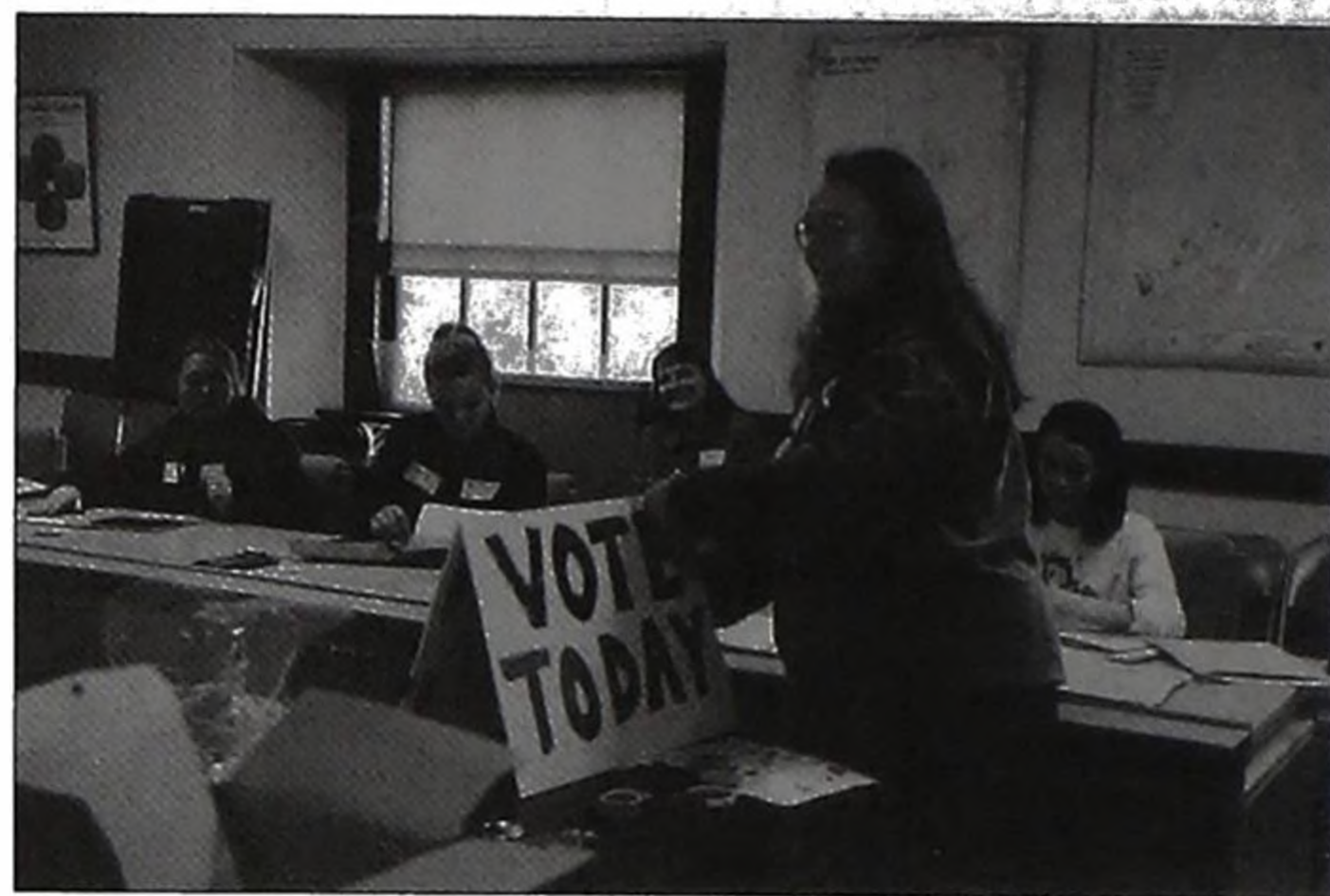
The girls left the adults behind as they acted as pages for state representatives during a live session. They also participated in mock public hearings on the bill that would prohibit the use of the word "squaw" to designate public places. In one group, three participants played the role of lawmaker; three were proponents of the bill, the remaining three were opposed.

Three adult women experienced in lobbying and State House politics coached the girls on their respective roles. Though all the girls admittedly supported the bill, it was testament to their ability to learn and argue the opposing position. In only 20 minutes, and scant coaching, the soon-to-be women took their places and played their parts. Some even devised their own lines and arguments to bolster their testimony.

The breathless morning traipsing up and down the Capitol's marble stairways ended with a chilly walk across the street to the Blaine House for lunch. Gov. King himself made an appearance, touting his proposal to buy laptop computers for all seventh-graders in Maine. He obviously expected a different response than the one he received from pupils who could benefit from his plan.

One by one, about a half-dozen girls, who appeared comfortable sitting cross legged on the floor in the luxurious room decorated with antiques, commented on his proposal, and suggested that the \$50 million he proposed might be better spent on improving their schools. On another timely issue, Miranda, who is on her Farmingdale school's civil rights team, inquired about the tenuous funding for that project. Other pupils had questions about the mandate on fingerprinting teachers they knew and trusted.

Though many challenged him, King honored his guests, listened attentively and responded to their concerns. Dressed in casual clothes - some in chunky-heeled shoes - these future voters exhibited poise, maturity and awareness of current affairs.



Chris Rusnov and Girls' Day participants discuss ways to effectively communicate a message to the public.

Then it was back the State House, where we were escorted into the then empty House chamber to await Speaker Rowe. The girls were invited to sit in the tall-backed leather chairs, where lawmakers had conducted the state's business only moments before. Rowe smiled broadly as he took his place at the rostrum

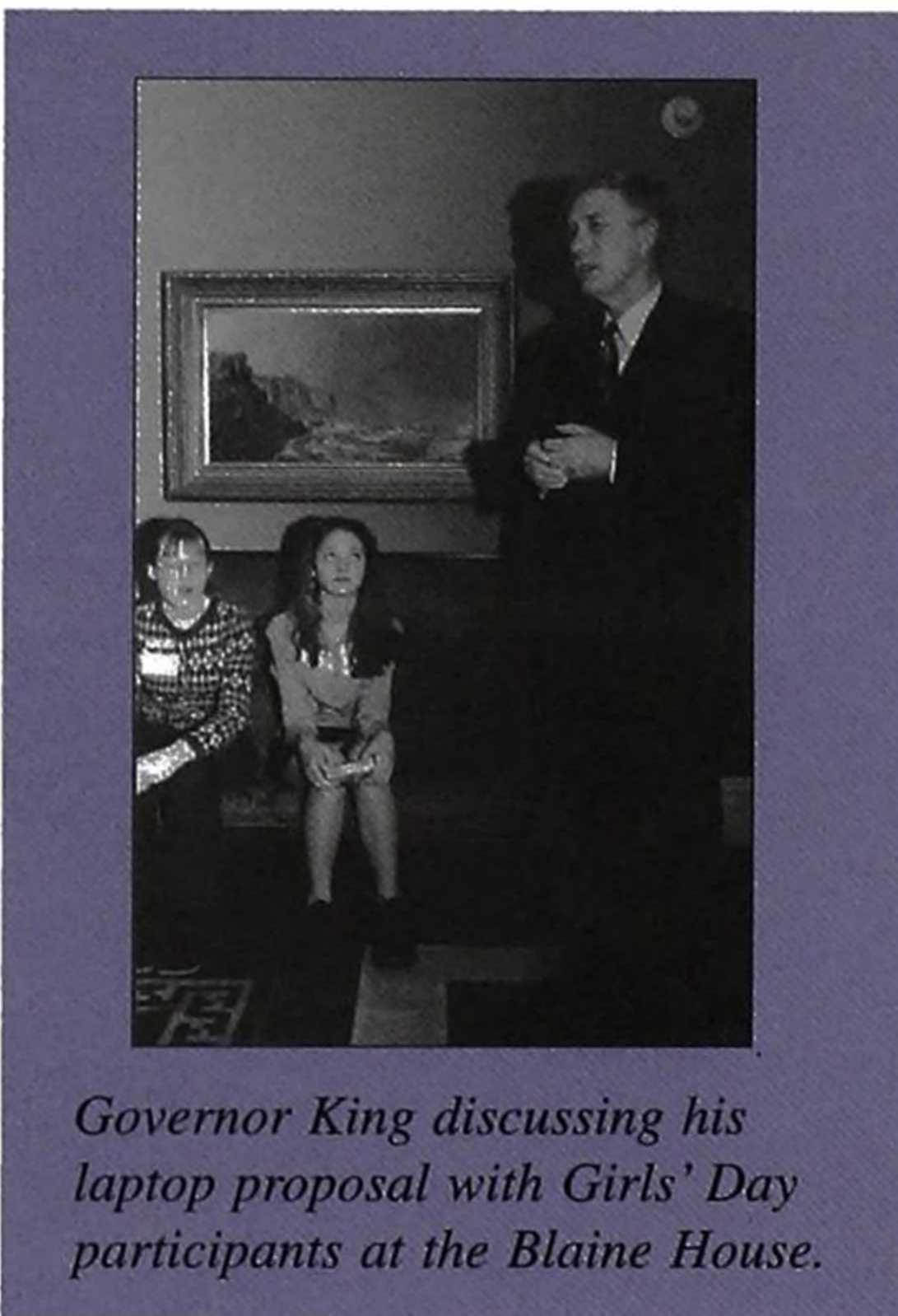
overlooking the tiered seating arrangement before him. He encouraged the girls to use the same level of decorum generally used when conducting House business and to address him as Mr. Speaker.

When he was asked, Rowe said he enjoyed the power he earned when he became speaker, but was quick to explain that as speaker, he must shed the mantle of partisanship and be responsive to lawmakers from both parties and the one independent member.

Rowe encouraged those present - as they vied for his attention - to get a good education and return for a career in public service. But perhaps the greatest gift he gave the girls was a heartfelt story about his own daughter Lindsay. Arriving home from school one day, she announced she would run for class representative. When he inquired, she told him that other posts up for election included the presidency. But she declined to run because, she said, "Only boys are running." Her father asked, "Why don't you try? You're popular, you get good grades." She promised to consider it. A few weeks passed. Then Rowe received a call while on the rostrum. It was Lindsay. She had been elected class president. Her female classmates hailed her success.

With a lump in my throat, I wondered then how many other girls today hear the words Rowe spoke to his own daughter and to the girls present there. "You can do it. Just try." The day was underscored by the fact that girls and women hunger for more leadership role models. Girls' Day at the State House lasts but a day. But society's investment in girls every day will result in empowering a new generation of women leaders, some of whom one day will become president.

Note: This article first appeared March 15, 2000, in the Bangor Daily News. Melissa MacCrae is a BDN copy desk editor and a board member with the Maine Women's Lobby.



Governor King discussing his laptop proposal with Girls' Day participants at the Blaine House.

SAVE THE DATE

July 24-28: Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Training at Central Maine Medical Center in Lewiston. FMI, contact Heather Emerson, Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault, at 626-0034 or email MeSANE@aol.com.

PROGRAMS/SERVICES

women for services related to breast health/breast cancer. Call the Maine Breast Cancer Coalition at 1-800-928-2644. **Dayspring AIDS Support Services** is offering the **Safe Passage Program**, a free training program where women learn about HIV prevention and become a certified peer educator. FMI, contact Faith Benedetti at 621-6201 or email daysprg@mint.net.

The **Support Services Fund** has been established to provide financial assistance to underserved Maine

FAREWELL TO OUR FABULOUS INTERNS

We'd never be able to make it through the year without the enthusiastic help of our interns. This year we were lucky to be joined by two very competent and energetic students, Krista Haapala and Martha Trombley.

Krista coordinated and skillfully facilitated the Women's Leadership Project last fall. This spring, Krista did extensive research and organizing for our pay equity campaign. She just received her MSW from Boston College and was recently hired as Community Organizer for the Bayside Neighborhood Association.

Martha was a phone bank captain for the NO on 1 Coalition last fall, doggedly reminding voters that "No" on question 1 was the only pro-choice vote. Martha's efforts shifted to helping our legislative efforts this spring. She and Krista were also both adult mentors for the Girls' Day at the State House. Martha is spending the summer interning in Congressman Tom Allen's office in Washington, D.C.

A big thank you to Martha and Krista for all of their hard work throughout the year. A special thanks to MWL Board Member Elizabeth Szatkowski for providing the requisite field supervision for Krista's MSW internship. We're still looking for two interns for the 2000-2001 school year. If you know of anyone who might be interested, please send them our way!



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Reminder: Send in your raffle tickets by June 30th!

