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The Maine Women's Advocate (2006 - Winter)

Maine Women's Lobby Staff

Maine Women's Lobby

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Staff, Maine Women's Lobby, "The Maine Women's Advocate (2006 - Winter)" (2006). *Maine Women's Publications - All*. 119.

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HAPPY BLOGGING!

The Maine Women's Lobby has taken yet another plunge into the world of cyber space with the Maine Women Online blog. The blog gives our members and others an inside look into the issues we care about.

A blog, otherwise known as a web log, is an interactive website that allows the blogger to quickly post their perspective on news, information, and events to a world of active online readers. Blogs are an increasingly important source of news and perspective in an era where much of the news is online.

Maine Women Online currently features posts from staff members, but we encourage our members to send their thoughts to post as well. Whether you have a news article to share, an event to post, or are just looking for a way to get something off your chest, e-mail us at info@mainewomen.org.

Check out Maine Women Online today at www.mainewomen.blogspot.com.

Women and Public Policy: Current Trends, Challenges, and Opportunities

Learn how to make a difference

Thursday, January 19, 2006 - 6:00 - 8:30 p.m.
Thursday, January 26, 2006 - 6:00 - 8:30 p.m.

This University of Southern Maine continuing education course will examine the history of women's political participation, connect students with policy measures aimed at meeting the needs of women and girls, and explore opportunities for further involvement.

Instructors:

Kim Simmons, Women's Studies Instructor
Sarah Standiford, Executive Director of the Maine Women's Lobby

Cost: \$65 (light dinner will be served)

To register, contact USM continuing education:

Phone: (207) 780-5900 or 1-800-787-0468
Fax: (207) 780-5954 TTY: (207) 780-5646
E-mail: cce@usm.maine.edu

The MAINE WOMEN'S ADVOCATE

WINTER 2006

Number 40



a publication of the

MAINE WOMEN'S
LOBBY

and the

MAINE WOMEN'S
POLICY CENTER

Fairness Prevails! Maine Ends Discrimination Once and for All

November 8, 2005 was the day that Maine people voted to uphold a law banning discrimination based on sexual and gender orientation. The Maine Women's Lobby is proud to have played a part in the historic Maine Won't Discriminate campaign.

We know that discrimination happens in Maine. That's why a nearly 2:1 bipartisan majority of the Legislature voted to pass *An Act to Extend Civil Rights Protections to All Maine People Regardless of Sexual Orientation*, giving all Maine people legal protection from discrimination in the areas of employment, housing, education, credit, and public accommodations.

Thanks to the hard work of Jesse Connolly, the campaign staff and volunteers at Maine Won't Discriminate, and the work of thousands of neighbors talking to neighbors about the importance of ending discrimination, Maine people voted to uphold the law by an astounding ten point margin. Said Maine Women's Lobby Director of Public Affairs, Lauralee Raymond, who worked as a field director during the campaign, "This vote affirms that Maine people will not tolerate discrimination and underscores the importance of working together to fight discrimination wherever it exists."



*Lauralee Raymond (front, left) celebrates with
No on 1 volunteers and staffers upon
seeing election results*

1e Women's Lobby Mobilizes January's Legislative Session



Health care is a vital issue that will be front and center when the 122nd Legislature reconvenes in January. The Maine Women's Lobby will be monitoring the effects of a potential cut of \$10 billion nationwide in federal Medicaid dollars over the next five years. We anticipate being on the front lines working to keep essential services available to those who need it most.

Last spring, the Maine Legislature helped protect seniors and people with disabilities by authorizing "wrap-around" funds for the implementation of the Federal Medicare Drug Benefit (L.D. 1325). As you've likely heard, beginning on January 1, 2006, seniors and people with disabilities nationwide who qualify for Medicare will be accessing prescriptions through this new Medicare prescription drug plan, called "Medicare Part D."

Unfortunately, this new benefit will leave many people in Maine with less coverage than they may have had under MaineCare and Maine's Drugs for the Elderly (DEL) program. As a response, the Legislature set aside \$4 million to be used to help fill the gaps in prescription drug coverage for MaineCare and

(continued inside)

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Meet the Women of the Maine Women's Lobby and Policy Center

Welcome to our new feature. In each edition of *The Advocate*, we will profile members of the Board of Directors and other volunteer leaders to help you get to know the women of the Maine Women's Lobby and the Maine Women's Policy Center. Enjoy!

Board Member
Mary Denison

Affiliation
Land Use and Environmental Attorney with Dyer, Goodall and Denison and Vice-chair of the Maine Women's Policy Center.



How did you become involved with the Lobby and the Policy Center?

As soon as I came on board with the firm, I contacted Laura Fortman (who was Executive Director at the time) and said "I'm back in the area and am now less encumbered than I was when I was in law school, and I want to help." Also, because of Linda Smith Dyer's connection. She founded this law firm and also helped to found the Maine Women's Lobby. My colleague, Tom Federle, was helpful as he had taken over Linda Dyer's lobbying practice, and he directed me to the Maine Women's Lobby when I mentioned I was interested in working on women's issues in the Legislature.

What inspires you to serve?

My greatest motivating factor is a woman's right to choose. Choice in general. That was engrained in me by my father who was a family practitioner here in Kennebec County and who was heavily involved in women's health at Kennebec Valley Family Planning. He did women's health, well-baby clinics, and progressive medicine in general.

In fact, I grew up being painfully aware about how difficult it can be when you don't have funding, awareness, and the laws that enable you to make well-informed decisions about your body.

Do you have other board or volunteer service?

I do some work with the Kennebec Land Trust. They are my focus for pro bono work at the law practice. I am also a member of the Readfield Planning Board. I think when my term with the Maine Women's Policy Center ends, my attention will turn to service on environmental issues for a period of time.

What is unique about the Maine Women's Policy Center and the Maine Women's Lobby?

Well, how fantastic is it to have an organization staffed with people who pore over every piece of legislation for any evidence of gender discrimination or issues concerning women and families or health care access? It is unique - and comforting - in that the Maine Women's Lobby and Policy Center are there to protect every one of us ... by doing something that not one of us has the time to do.

What would you say to people wanting to get involved for the first time?

I think when you are asked to be on a board, you take a deep breath and try to determine whether you have time in your life to commit to another obligation. But I have found at the Maine Women's Policy Center that the reward is great compared to the amount of time required of a board member.

I think the reason it is a rewarding place to serve is because you see fairly immediate results both in the fundraising activities and in the legislative session, which is only a few months here in Maine. You can see how incredibly successful the lobbying efforts were. In that way it is unique and incredibly rewarding. It's nice to have that short-term success. For action-oriented people, it's a great place to be.

The Family Care Act: More Time to Care

On September 17, the Family Care Act went into effect. Sponsored by Senate President Beth Edmonds and advanced by the Maine Women's Lobby and a broad coalition, the Family Care Act aims to help workers care for an ill family member without risking their job. For more details, read on:

What is the Family Care Act?

◆ The Family Care Act enables employees to use their already accrued sick or vacation time to care either for themselves or for an ill child, parent, or spouse.



Senate President Beth Edmonds and members of the Labor Committee join Governor Baldacci in a signing ceremony for the Family Care Act

Who qualifies for leave?

◆ If an employer provides sick or vacation time and has 25 or more employees, Maine law now allows those employees to annually use up to 40 hours of already earned time to care for an ill family member. In this case they can no longer be fired, suspended, demoted, or punished for leaving work to do so.

What if an employer provides both paid sick leave and paid vacation?

◆ If an employee has saved both sick leave and vacation time, then what time he or she uses flexibly depends on the employer's current policy. Employers can only choose the type of leave an employee takes if it is part of a bona fide policy that is uniformly applied.

Justice in the Balance

The past few months have seen tremendous changes to the United States Supreme Court. After the confirmation of John Roberts to be Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, the Maine Women's Lobby turned our attention to the pending vacancy created by the retirement of Justice Sandra Day O'Connor.

If the withdrawal of Harriet Miers and the subsequent nomination of Judge Samuel Alito has shown us anything, it is that President Bush is willing to put satisfying his political base above the rights and needs of all Americans.

The seat left vacant by Justice O'Connor is of the utmost importance to women. Justice O'Connor has been an independent voice and a critical swing vote on numerous cases protecting the rights of women, including decisions concerning affirmative action, sexual harassment, and the right to privacy.

In contrast, throughout his fifteen years on the bench, Judge Alito has argued to turn back the clock on civil rights, protections for working families and women's health and safety. His decisions - and frequent dissents - on such matters as sex and race discrimination, the Family Medical Leave Act, access to abortion, and disability protections are cause for great concern for Maine women. In a 1985 job application to the White House, Judge Alito states unequivocally his judicial philosophy that "The Constitution does not protect a right to an abortion." The Maine Women's Lobby is calling on Senators Snowe and Collins to oppose this nomination. Too much is at stake for Maine people should Judge Alito be confirmed to a lifetime appointment on the nation's highest court.

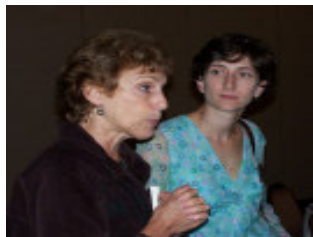


Maine Women's Lobby activists - dressed as suffragettes - use Women's Equality Day to draw attention to the threat to the Supreme Court

Maine Women Celebrate at the Breakfast of Champions

Early risers at the Maine Women's Policy Center's annual Breakfast of Champions in Portland were rewarded with a stimulating keynote by Ellen Bravo, former National Director of 9to5.

Said Ellen, "Women need more than talk about the glass ceiling- it is time to redesign the building!" We couldn't agree more. Ellen's energizing and engaging talk encouraged advocates, business leaders, and policymakers to work towards redesigning the workplace for the benefit of our communities. Policies to expand family medical leave, guarantee paid sick days, bolster women's wages, and increase education and training are the key to ensuring success for our families, businesses, and communities.



Author and advocate Ellen Bravo chats with Maine Women's Lobby members at the 2005 Breakfast of Champions

We were delighted to present Wright Express with our first Action Award in recognition of their family support, violence prevention, and harassment intervention policies. Their leadership recognizes the needs of a changing workforce and exemplifies a best practice that others can emulate.

In Bangor and Presque Isle, guests enjoyed hearing how the workplace has changed - and what remains to be done. Marjorie Stockford recounted the 1973 sex-discrimination settlement between AT & T and the U.S. government as told in her book, The Bellwomen. The case served as a catalyst, driving many more women into the workplace and into non-traditional occupations. As Marjorie pointed out, though, women have a long way to go before reaching parity with men, particularly among leadership positions in our society.

With three weather systems colliding and four inches of snow on the ground, we were delighted that Marjorie and our friends and members from the County were willing to

brave the weather and come out to connect about such an important issue. Special thanks to Northern Maine Community College and the Houlton, Presque Isle, and Caribou branches of the American Association of University Women for once again hosting the event. We'd also like to thank our major sponsors, the Cinciva/Baker Fund at Maine Initiatives and Verrill Dana LLP. Their support, and that of dozens of other sponsors and volunteers, made the Breakfast of Champions series a success once again.

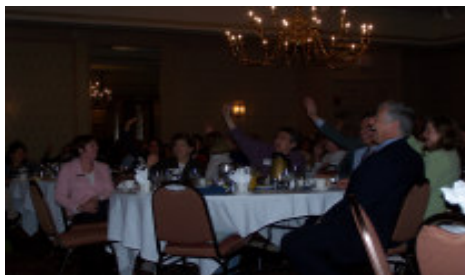
Welcome New Board Members

On September 7, the Maine Women's Policy Center and Maine Women's Lobby Boards bid farewell to outgoing members Kristin Aiello, Elizabeth Kilbreth, Pamela Bruno MacDonald, and Karen Wagner. Thanks to all for your many years of dedication and service!

We also welcomed four new members to the Maine Women's Policy Center Board of Directors: Pamela Boivin, Kelley Hughes, Carol Lenna, and Jean Principe.

And to the Maine Women's Lobby Board of Directors: Kimm Collins, Elizabeth Ward Saxl, Mary Townsend, and Elizabeth Watson.

Welcome!



Congressman Michael Michaud, Congressman Tom Allen, and Commissioner Laura Fortman are tested as Ellen Bravo quizzes the audience on the status of women in the workplace

From the Executive Director

Change is incremental - usually. Sometimes, we can measure the impact of our actions in weeks and even days. For example, towards the end of spring's legislative session, the Maine Women's Lobby celebrated success on 33 of the 35 bills we worked. And this fall, the impact of this work was made visible with the implementation of Maine's Family Care Act and continued expansion of Unemployment Insurance for Part-Time Workers.

We have much to be thankful for this season - namely, our members and supporters who make our work for women possible and who help all Maine people see the results of our ambitious agenda.

And what an agenda! A brief summary from our busy autumn:

- ◆ In October, we celebrated, alongside hundreds of members and supporters, the work to increase economic opportunity for women by welcoming Ellen Bravo and Marjorie Stockford to our Breakfast of Champions.
- ◆ As part of the Maine Won't Discriminate and Equality Maine team, we helped uphold Maine's law banning discrimination against gays and lesbians in referendum vote with an overwhelming victory on November 8.
- ◆ In early December, we partnered with the Family Planning Association to train 60 advocates and potential women candidates how to run a successful campaign, conquer the camera, work with clean elections, and overcome the barriers to elected office. Many thanks to **Green Design Furniture** and to **Moose Ridge Associates** for sponsoring this nonpartisan event along with our non-profit partners.
- ◆ And finally, throughout this season we called for a fair and independent judiciary, working to oppose the confirmation of Justice Samuel Alito to the Supreme Court. Our activists traveled from Caribou to Kittery to talk with residents in 14 towns about the danger Alito's confirmation could pose to Maine women. There is much work ahead. Here's to a New Year of peace, prosperity, and advancement for Maine women and girls!

Legislative Session, continued from front page

and DEL members. This is not enough money to pay all the costs of prescription drugs now covered by MaineCare and DEL, but it will help make drugs more affordable. Members of the Legislature will also consider whether additional assistance is needed when they reconvene.

To combat poverty among working families, the Maine Women's Lobby will once again be supporting raising the minimum wage (L.D. 235), a carry over bill from last session. The current Maine minimum wage, as of October 1, is \$6.50. This bill aims to raise the minimum wage to \$6.75 on October 1, 2006 and to \$7.00 beginning October 1, 2007. We support raising the minimum wage because studies continue to show that the main beneficiaries of an increase are working women, simply because as a group they earn less than men.

Another carry over bill is *An Act to Provide for Victims of Trafficking* (L.D. 1296) introduced by Representative Lisa Marrache. The Legislature will revisit whether or not to authorize a study commission to assess this problem in Maine and discuss possible solutions. The Maine Women's Lobby supports the development of such a commission and will work to bring data and information forward about the impact of trafficking on women in Maine.

Last spring, Representative Arthur Lerman introduced a bill authorizing the formation of a study commission on livable wages (L.D. 1236). With the Legislature's approval, that commission is now meeting to "identify ways to ensure that all Maine adults earn a livable wage." Maine Women's Lobby Executive Director, Sarah Standiford, was named to this commission by Speaker John Richardson and will serve to represent the interests of women and low-income people in the development of recommendations to go before the Legislature in January.

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