The Man from Maine: a Special WLBZ Documentary on Edmund S. Muskie

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ANNOUCER: WLBZ presents The Man from Maine. [Music]

NARRATOR 1: From the Maine State House of Representatives to the Vice Presidential candidacy of the Democratic Party of the United States is a long, winding political trail, but Senator Edmund S. Muskie took it in his lanky, New England stride to stand tall as one of the most respected political figures in our country today.

NARRATOR 2: Edmund Sixtus Muskie, the first Democratic Governor of the rock-ribbed state of Maine in 20 years.

NARRATOR 1: Edmund S. Muskie, the first popularly elected Democratic US. Senator in Maine's history.

NARRATOR 2: Ed Muskie, the Man from Maine [Music]

NARRATOR 1: WLBZ Radio presents The Man from Maine, a transcribed documentary going back over the years that led to the emergence of Senator Edmund Muskie as a major political figure of our time. [Music]

NARRATOR 2: Edmund Muskie was born March 28th, 1914, the son of Mrs. Josephine Muskie and the late Stephen Muskie, an immigrant tailor who came to the United States from Poland in 1903. The senator from Maine was one of six children and his family recalls his childhood as a shy, quiet one, a time marked by extensive reading. Muskie attended Stephens High School in Rumford and took up debating at the urging of one of his teachers. That skill was to mark his years at Bates College in Lewiston where he graduated in 1936 as president of his class, with a Phi Beta Kappa. Three years later, he took a degree from Cornell Law School and returned to Maine to take up the practice of law in Waterville. Navy service in World War II interrupted his legal career for a time with Muskie seeing duty in the Pacific Theater. He was an engineering and deck officer with the rank of lieutenant. Following his separation from the service, he again returned to his native state. In 1948, he married the pert, attractive Jane Grey, whose face became almost as familiar as the senator's to Maine residents. The Muskie family now numbers seven in all. The senator and his wife, 19-year old Stephen, a sophomore at the University of Maine, 17-year old Helen, who hopes to enter college next fall, 12 year-old Melinda, 10 year-old Martha and Edmund, Jr., nicknamed Ned, who is 7.
NARRATOR 1: Politically speaking, it all started in 1946 when Ed Muskie was elected to the State House of Representatives from one of the few Democratic pockets in Maine at that time. He went to Capitol Hill to join a spattering of fellow Democrats in a traditionally Republican dominated legislature. The shy, self-effacing young attorney moved quietly through the Statehouse corridors doing his homework diligently. He served as Minority Leader during his last two terms, but there weren’t too many to lead. In Muskie’s first term in the Maine House, the assembled lawmakers were unwittingly given a look at the future. The legislators, in a traditional pre adjournment mock session, take time out for lampooning and for hijinks. They elected state officers and that year they chose three governors. Ed Muskie was one of them. His fellow lawmakers had a good chuckle over that one. Imagine a Democrat as a governor of Maine. More good-natured laughter. But in 1954, that mock election came true, and that year, the Democrats were casting about for a gubernatorial candidate. Few wanted to go the long, hard trail. Few wanted to waste the time in the effort and what was traditionally a lost cause. The role of gubernatorial candidate for the minority party was likened to that of a sacrificial lamb.

NARRATOR 2: Finally, the party leaders decided that young Ed Muskie would be the man. After long talks in the young lawyer’s office, the Waterville Representative consented and started the road to Election Day. Muskie campaigned inexpensively but widely. He visited every corner of the state. He spoke to thousands of voters. He shook hundreds of hands. In Bangor, as in other communities, Ed Muskie stumped the Main Street going into stores, talking to voters on sidewalks, giving everyone that shy, diffident grin that was to become the trademark of the young politician. The pundits wagged their heads. Young Ed was doing a good job. Too bad it had to go to waste. Incumbent Governor Burton M. Cross was a shoo-in. That’s the way the betting went. But the pundits forgot one thing, John Q. Citizen. Republicans couldn’t believe it when the return started coming in. Muskie was forging ahead of Cross by a comfortable margin. When the dust had finally settled the Republican Party was shaken and groggy. Ed Muskie was the victor by more than 22,000 votes. But again the political observers shook their collective heads. A Democratic governor confronted by a Republican legislature and Executive Council. The new Chief Executive was in for a hard time.

NARRATOR 1: In his inaugural, Governor Muskie gave an indication of where one of his interests lay. Even then, Ed Muskie, who was later to be known as the Mr. Clean of the US Senate, was talking about pollution.

VOICE OF MUSKIE: ... is recommended at this time. First, completion of the work of classification of waters within two years and appropriation of the necessary funds. Second, a tightening of the third highest classification, Class C, which under present law, is too broad. Three, reorganization of the water improvement commission to have increased representation to public members having no direct connection with industry. Four, in addition, the Commission should be required to explore the possibilities of pollution abatement and to report its findings in two years together with its recommendations relative to methods, costs, and the setting of a time limit for compliance.

NARRATOR 1: Following his inauguration, the new governor took a firm hand on the helm. He cut spending, he initiated reforms. His was a good administration and in 1956 the electorate returned Ed Muskie to the governor’s mansion for another two-year term.
ANNOUNCER: You are listening to The Man from Maine, a special WLBZ documentary going back through the years that led to the emergence of Maine Senator Edmund S. Muskie as a major political figure of our time. [Music]

NARRATOR 2: In 1958 after compiling an impressive list of accomplishments as Governor, such as the creation of the Department of Economic Development and increasing subsidies to education, Governor Muskie decided to try for national office. He announced his intention to run for the US Senate against former two-time governor and incumbent Senator Frederick G. Payne. Once again, Muskie showed his magic at the polls, defeating his Republican opponent. In the early morning hours of September 8th, 1958, Fred Payne conceded the election to the lanky, Waterville Democrat.

VOICE OF PAYNE: I offer my full cooperation to him as he assumes his new responsibilities. My sincere and heart-felt thanks go to the thousands of people across the state who have stood by me knowing of my efforts for all of our people. We waged a high-level campaign in the best tradition of American politics. And we accept the decision of the majority in that same spirit.

NARRATOR 1: Even though he was the first popularly elected Democratic US Senator in Maine’s history, Ed Muskie was humbled in victory. He issued this statement from his campaign headquarters.

VOICE OF MUSKIE: I have just received Senator Payne’s congratulations. I am most appreciative of his courtesy and take this opportunity to congratulate him on a vigorous and hard-fought campaign. As always, on occasions such as this, I am sobered as well as stimulated by the serious responsibilities and challenges which confront me. I will do everything in my power to justify the faith and confidence of my fellow citizens, striving always to measure up to the highest possible standards of service which they have a right to expect of me. With all my heart, I say thank you to all those who supported me at the polls. To my fellow candidate and to those who work so tirelessly on my behalf for a victory which would not have been possible without them.

NARRATOR 2: Senator-elect Muskie tied up the loose ends of his Governorship, resigned the post, and packed his bags and growing family off to the nation’s capital. Muskie’s career in the Senate started on what might be termed a declining note. It was the displeasure of then Senator Lyndon B. Johnson that was a factor in molding the junior senator from Maine’s political future. In 1959, Muskie voted with Senate liberals to amend the rules so that filibusters could be more easily stopped. Johnson, then Senate Majority Leader, had sought the freshman Senator’s support to defeat the proposed change, but Ed Muskie showed his independence and voted with the liberals. The Johnson faction won, and Ed Muskie received relatively minor committee assignments as a punishment for bucking the powerful Texan. The minor assignments, and in politics the ill wind adage often applies, led Senator Muskie to the forefront. He became known as a leader in the battle against air and water pollution. From another assignment, he emerged as a key figure in determining the shortcomings of federal grant in aid programs to state and local governments.
NARRATOR 1: Maine’s junior Senator was much in demand as a speaker and he returned to Maine often, as often as Senate business permitted. In June of 1959 he was the principal speaker at the annual Bangor Chamber of Commerce banquet. He commented on the then stalled at Geneva talks for WLBZ News

VOICE OF MUSKIE: Well, of course, I haven’t been on the inside of these negotiations and it’s always difficult and I’m always wary of commenting simply upon the public indications of developments. Certainly we are all very much disturbed and concerned that the Conference has recessed without any indication of possibility of getting together on even the narrowest kind of issue base. The Russians seem to be completely intransigent. And this is the disturbing thing, not so much that they aren’t willing to honestly try for agreement is the fact that they apparently are so sure of themselves and their military strength, that they’re not particularly interested in trying to reach an agreement. This is the most troublesome thing about what has happened at Geneva. Of course, as long as we’re talking, and as long as the conference is only recessed, we can always hope that the pressures will change in such a way as to ...

NARRATOR: Senator Muskie came to Bangor again in 1962 and had some thoughtful comment on the Cuban situation.

VOICE OF MUSKIE: The problem we've got at hand is this one of Cuba. I think we've got it well in hand in that we intend to press our point and our position as firmly as we can. And we're going to do that on the merits of this situation. Now I would have to, as we have had to in the past, take the next Soviet move, or the next red Chinese move, as and when it comes. I hope that we'll constantly assert a position of firmness, retreating nowhere, giving up nothing of value to us, and constantly exerting counter pressure of our own. I think this is the only way, in the long run, that we're going to prevail in this Cold War struggle.

NARRATOR: In his first term as US Senator, Ed Muskie established a reputation as a quiet, knowledgeable man, a man who often spoke with almost classical rhetoric. A man who could be counted on to deliver. He received a high accolade for a freshman Senator. Senior members of the upper chamber tagged him as a man who did his homework. In 1964, Ed Muskie faced a decision that confronts every politician, whether or not to run for reelection. Maine’s junior Senator opted for another term.

VOICE OF MUSKIE: My formal announcement as a candidate for re-election to the United States Senate will come as no surprise to many of you. Several weeks ago, in response to a question on a television program, I inadvertently revealed my intention. Nevertheless, I think it is important for me as a candidate to speak directly to you. As your Senator, I am accountable to you at all times and as we enter an election year, you have a right to know my plans. It is now almost ten years since I first announced my candidacy for major public office in the state of Maine. In 1954, I asked for your support...
NARRATOR: The year 1964 was also a Presidential year, and as usual the speculation derby on Vice Presidential candidates was in full swing. The Muskie possibility was bandied about by the pundits. But the man from Maine would say neither yes, nor no. Appearing on the NBC Today Show, he gave a good Yankee non-committal answer.

VOICE OF MUSKIE: No, this is something I would not expect to happen, Bob. And since you originated the report, I think that you’d be the best source for substantiating it.

NARRATOR: But Ed Muskie was highly regarded by the Democratic hierarchy. At the convention he was accorded the honor of seconding the nomination of Lyndon Baines Johnson. Many noted the striking similarity between the Muskie delivery and that of the late President John F. Kennedy.

VOICE OF MUSKIE: It is also the test by which we must measure the man who will lead us during the next four years. We need a man of compassion, who feels the stirring in men's hearts. Lyndon Johnson is that man. [Applause] It is because, I believe our world and our children are safe in his hands that I am proud to second the nomination of President Lyndon B. Johnson for the Presidency of the United States. [Applause]

NARRATOR: Following the convention, the lanky Waterville Democrat returned to Maine to hit the campaign trail. He talked to the voters of Maine from the rostrum, on the street, at crowded Grange suppers, in parking lots, through the news media. In November the voters answered his efforts with a landslide mandate. A democratic sweep that pulled practically the entire right hand side of the ballot into office. Ed Muskie went back to Washington for another term. [Music]

ANNOUNCER: You are listening to The Man from Maine, a transcribed WLBZ documentary tracing the long political trail that has brought Senator Edmund S. Muskie into the forefront of the Democratic Party today. [Music]

NARRATOR: Senator Muskie was not out of touch with his home state even though he was on the ascendancy as a national figure. On November 9th of 1964, an economic blow to the city of Bangor, the announced closing of the sprawling Dow Air Force Base. Ed Muskie had a comment for WLBZ News.

MUSKIE: I like to say at the outset that I've written the following letter to Secretary McNamara, and I quote from it. “The decision to phase out [?] operations at the Dow Air Force Base in Bangor Maine carry serious implications for the future economic health of that community and the area surrounding it. Although I recognize the considerations which led to this decision, I hope that the phasing out program will be carried out in such a way that a change in future policies with reference to demand on the program could take advantage of the capability of Dow as a [recording faded out]

NARRATOR: On another matter, the Maine senator had been a powerful Senate backer of the controversial Dickey Lincoln School Public Power Project. In 1964, preliminary approval of Dickey, hailed by the Senator from Maine.

MUSKIE: I am gratified to report that the Senate Public Works Committee, at my request, today voted unanimously to include authorization of the Dickey-Lincoln School Power Project in the Omnibus Rivers
and Harbors Bill. The Committee ordered the bill forwarded to the Senate for action. This prompt action now enables us to take our case to the Senate at this session of the Congress.

NARRATOR: Ed Muskie was still in demand as a speaker. On December 1st, 1966, he was the principal speaker at the second annual pre legislative conference in Augusta. He commented on a proposal that two years later was to become a reality, an income tax hike.

MUSKIE: Well, I think I feel about it as the economists do. I was reading an analysis just the other day of the opinion of economists and they seem to be about equally divided and the writer of the column suggested the only way to resolve the issue is to toss a coin. We don't want, any of us, to overreact to the situation.

NARRATOR: Senator Muskie began to loom larger on the national scene. He stepped up his campaign against air and water pollution. He began to be known as Mr. Clean. He carried out important assignments for the Johnson administration, going behind the Iron Curtain as a presidential envoy. He was also a member of a team of lawmakers designated to observe the elections in South Vietnam. Outside of Maine people no longer said “Ed Who?” when the Muskie name was mentioned. Early in 1968, on March 31st, an announcement that would, though few thought at the time, have a profound effect on the future of the man from Maine. From the White House, President Johnson took himself out of the reelection picture.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I do not believe that I should devote an hour or a day of my time to any personal partisan causes or to any duties other than the awesome duties of this office, the presidency, of your country. Accordingly, I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your President.

NARRATOR: From then on, it was a wide-open, free-swinging race for the Democratic nomination. McCarthy, Kennedy, Humphrey, you took your pick and you also took your pick of vice presidential possibilities. On June 4th, the nation was shocked by the assassination of Senator Robert Kennedy. And the entire picture was changed as was Ed Muskie’s role in the shape of things to come. As the convention drew near, Ed Muskie was emerging more and more as one of the leading spokesman for the Democratic Party. On August 19th, he spoke on the proposed Vietnam plank in the party platform at pre convention hearings in Washington.

MUSKIE: For these reasons, I think it would be a mistake for the Democratic platform to prescribe tactical military and diplomatic moves at this distance from the perspectives of the negotiating table and the Intelligence estimates available to the President. [Applause]

NARRATOR: In the latter part of August, the Chicago Convention now a byword for political chaos and violence. The observers tagged Humphrey as a shoo-in for the presidential nomination. But what about the second spot in the ticket? Once again the name of Ed Muskie figured prominently. He was accorded the honor of leading off the list of speakers on the Vietnam plank on the convention floor.
MUSKIE: ...arising north of the Demilitarized Zone. The kind of protection, I remind you, that brought relief to our boys at Que Son. Mr. Chairman, I urge the adoption of the majority plank. [Applause]

NARRATOR: With every passing hour, stronger speculation that Muskie would be named by Humphrey for the second spot on the ticket. The Maine delegation headed by Governor Curtis expressed optimism and hope. But still no word from the Vice President. Then shortly before six o'clock on the evening of August 29th, Hubert Humphrey held a news conference.

VICE-PRESIDENT HUMPHREY: Ladies and gentlemen and my fellow Americans, I come to this platform to tell you that I shall recommend to the National Convention Democratic Party for the office of Vice-President a very distinguished the United States Senator and I think one of the most capable, experienced, and able men in government today. He is the United States Senator from Maine, Mr. Edmund Muskie. [Applause]

NARRATOR: So Maine had its first Vice-Presidential candidate since the days of Lincoln and Hannibal Hamlin. In the Pine Tree State, jubilation, with Republicans joining in the cheers for Ed Muskie in his new role. Democrats were especially cheered. There was much talk of the coattail effect the Senator would have on the ballot. In Chicago, Ed Muskie took it all in stride, although he still seemed a little awed when interviewed at the convention by NBC's Sander Vanocher.

VANOCHER: Is some kind of a hope for those in the party who feel they are in the minority plank, that they didn't get their way, would like something better?

MUSKIE: Well, as you know, Sandy, the same policy can be administered differently by two different men. I couldn't predict exactly what Hubert Humphrey would do under the given circumstances, but I think his instinct is toward negotiation, toward settlement, and I think he's inclined to take reasonably calculated risks to do it. And I think that's how I measure a man, rather than by the exact words that are used.

VANOCHER: And when will you be starting your campaign, sir?

MUSKIE: Well, I started it tonight.

NARRATOR: That evening, the speeches. Senator Fred Harris of Oklahoma nominated his fellow Democrat for the Vice Presidential candidacy.

HARRIS: This, this is the crucial mission of our political leadership. It is the mission that only this Democratic Party can fulfill. And I'm proud to stand here and support, as I have, the man who has pledged himself to this historic mission, Hubert H. Humphrey. [Applause] And it is in the spirit of this pledge that I shall nominate for the high office of Vice-President of the United States the United States Senator Edmund S. Muskie of Maine.

NARRATOR: The nomination was seconded by Governor Curtis.
CURTIS: Second the nomination of Senator Edmund S. Muskie for the office of Vice-President of the United States. [Applause] For over 20 years, the people of Maine have been privileged to have Senator Muskie as their public servant. As a municipal officer, as the state legislator, as a governor, and as a United States Senator. In each of those offices, he has demonstrated those qualities so necessary for leadership in these troubled times: character, courage, compassion, and conviction. Senator Muskie is in every sense fully prepared to assume the responsibilities of national leadership. The presidency of this nation is an awesome position requiring extraordinary gifts of reasoned judgment and energy. Our great presidents have all been men who have been able to discern the vital issues amid the confusion and the excitement of daily events. On issue after issue, Senator Muskie has demonstrated an uncanny ability to perceive the problems of the future.

NARRATOR: That was the seconding speech by Governor Curtis for the nomination of Senator Muskie to the Vice Presidential candidacy of the Democratic Party. Then the balloting, state-by-state. There was speculation and there were rumors that there would be a floor fight over the nomination, but only token opposition, democratic state representative Julian Bond of Georgia. And he did not fit the constitutional requirements as to age. So it was Humphrey-Muskie. The Maine senator made his acceptance speech.

MUSKIE: We must surpass all our previous efforts, not so much for the success of our party, but for the survival of liberty in our country. [Applause] And I might close by suggesting as a standard, the words of a voice from an ancient democracy in Greece. The words were these. We are capable at the same time of taking risks and of estimating them beforehand. Others are brave out of ignorance, and when they stop to think, they begin to fear. But the man who can most truly be accounted brave is he who best knows the meaning of what is sweet in life, and of what is terrible, then goes out undeterred to meet what is to come. And so my fellow Americans, let us make certain that we know the difference between what is sweet in life, and what is terrible, and that we then go out undeterred to meet what is to come. It is in this spirit that I accept your nomination and will try to justify it. [Applause]

[Music]

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[Music]

NARRATOR: Following the convention, the campaign. And in this jet age, it was California in the morning, New York that night. Senator Muskie, complete with press corps, Secret Service men, and staff, stumped the country making a favorable impression wherever he went. Some published reports said that Ed Muskie was the one that was carrying the campaign for the Democrats, not his running mate. The campaign of 1968 might be called the campaign of the heckler. Everywhere the candidates were met with youthful dissent. Their remarks were shouted down. There were boos and catcalls. Some candidates shouted back. Some stood in stony silence. But the lanky State on Mainer used what was to become known as the Muskie ploy. He invited the hecklers to the platform to have their say. Brooklyn, New York, October 10th, 1968.
[Someone shouting, It isn’t fair people, isn’t fair, people have to come up here... other audience members booing]

MUSKIE: Now let him have five minutes. He’s agreed then to give me five minutes. Is that a fair deal?

AUDIENCE: Yeah! Yeah, yeah!

SPEAKER FROM AUDIENCE: I think that tells ya’ll something about yourselves, right there. You won’t listen to a black man, but you’ll listen to the pig. I think that tells you something, right there. This man’s coming right here with the same thing that they’ve been promising us for the last four years. Four years, and [inaudible] ya’ll still going for it. They come here with this music and you all start tapping your feet. This has been our [band?] for the last four years.

MUSKIE: There’s only one way to build a country. And that is for us to talk to each other. To learn to trust each other in spite of the fact that there’s evidence on both sides against us. But I think there’s plenty of evidence to indicate that we can work together, that we can talk together, that we can build together, a country that is good for you, as well as for everybody else, and good for me. [Let’s try and test it?]

NARRATOR: Ed Muskie did not neglect Maine on his campaign swings even though observers said that the Pine Tree State was in his pocket. On October 16th in the mid afternoon of a chill overcast fall day, the Muskie entourage landed at Bangor International Airport in the candidate’s chartered Boeing 727. And though the weather was negative the welcome home for Ed Muskie was warm and sincere.

AUDIO CLIP: [Applause] And in steps Senator Muskie, smiling and waving, stepping off his Eastern Airlines 727 jet after the flight Presque Isle, accompanied by Governor and Mrs. Curtis and by Congressman Bill Hathaway. Being greeted by city officials now and by Democratic Party leaders here, going down the receiving line. [Noise of the crowd]

NARRATOR: Following a motorcade to downtown Bangor, the Senator delivered a free swinging speech in jammed Mercantile Square

MUSKIE: And there's something Mr. Nixon's gonna learn, that Governor Cross learned 14 years ago. Mr. Nixon made the decision yesterday, when he had his Republican leaders in both houses of the Congress kill that presidential debate, though. He made a decision not to debate Mr. Humphrey this year and his decision was based upon the assumption that he was so far ahead that the safest course for him to take was to ride with the tide into victory. Well, he's going to learn that the American people want a Presidential candidate who has the guts to confront his opponents, to challenge their ideas, to have his ideas challenged, to exchange views, to state their positions on the war, on law and order, on race relations, on the problems of our citizens. [Applause] Instead of all, all we see your signs like this, that smiling face which never speaks. Traveling up and down the country spending three days a week and Key Biscayne deepening his tan so that he looks good on television. Mr. Nixon's going to learn that it takes something more than looks, even manufactured looks, to win an election campaign. [Applause]
NARRATOR: And that was the campaign. For Ed Muskie, the campaign ended on November 4th. He jetted to the west coast for a final appearance, then home. A talk to boost Maine Democratic candidates. A final round of handshaking. The next day would tell the story. Senator and Mrs. Muskie voted in Waterville Tuesday morning, then went to a motel headquarters to await the returns. As far as Maine went, it was clear that the Muskie Magic was working at the top of the ballot, anyhow. The Humphrey-Muskie ticket gradually forged ahead, as did the state’s two incumbent Democratic Congressman Peter Kyros of the first District and William Hathaway of the second. But this was not to be a Democratic flood as was 1964. At the state level, the Republicans retained control of the legislature but not by any sweeping mandate. Nationally, the Nixon-Agnew ticket crept ahead. And at the early morning hours of November 6, it was apparent that the GOP had the needed electoral college majority. But the popular majority was close, the hackneyed whisker-thin edge. By mid-morning of that Wednesday, Hubert Humphrey held a final news conference.

HUMPHREY: I shall continue my personal commitment to the cause of human rights, of peace, and to the betterment of man. If I have helped in this campaign to move these causes forward, I feel rewarded. I have done my best. I have lost. Mr. Nixon has won. The democratic process has worked its will. So now let’s get on with the urgent task of uniting our country. Thank you. [Applause]

NARRATOR: For Humphrey and Muskie, a defeat at the polls. But a personal victory for Senator Muskie, the campaign had brought him into national prominence. Already there is talk of 1972, although the Senator will not comment. In 1970, his second term will expire and probably, so the predictions go, he will run for re-election. And the predictions also say that if he runs, he wins. Then, 1972. A lot of speculation will take place between now and the next presidential year, but one thing is certain. Don't count Ed Muskie out. He's mighty tall presidential timber.

[Music]

NARRATOR: You've been listening to The Man from Maine, a specially transcribed WLBZ documentary on the years that saw Maine United States Senator Edmund S. Muskie rise from the State House of Representatives to become one of the most respected political figures of our time. The Man from Maine was written by John Wellington and produced by Dan Everett. This is the Maine Broadcasting Company. [Music]

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For more information about this transcript, audio recording, or other materials in Special Collections at the University of Maine, contact:

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