

The University of Maine

DigitalCommons@UMaine

General University of Maine Publications

University of Maine Publications

11-10-2006

Robert A. Kennedy Keynote Address at the Action Committee of 50 Annual Meeting

Robert A. Kennedy
University of Maine

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/univ_publications



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [History Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Kennedy, Robert A., "Robert A. Kennedy Keynote Address at the Action Committee of 50 Annual Meeting" (2006). *General University of Maine Publications*. 1614.

https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/univ_publications/1614

This Presentation is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in General University of Maine Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine. For more information, please contact um.library.technical.services@maine.edu.



President's Office Links

[Welcome](#)

[Administration](#)

[Biography](#)

[Board of Visitors](#)

[Installation](#)

[Magazine Profiles](#)

[Photo Gallery](#)

[President's House](#)

[Speeches](#)

[Strategic Plan](#)

[UMaine History](#)

[UMaine Presidents](#)

[Videos](#)

Quicklinks

Office of the President

Action Committee of 50 Annual Meeting Keynote Address

Nov. 10, 2006

Robert A. Kennedy, President, University of Maine

Thank you for the invitation, and for recognizing UMaine's important and growing role in economic development, and for giving me this opportunity to talk about UMaine's present, and its future.

UMaine is proud of its long association with the Action Committee of 50.

This important group was founded, as you know, by a UMaine president--Arthur Johnson--more than 30 years ago.

Over the many years of its existence, this committee has been a key force in forging important connections between the university and the local business community.

Just looking out here at our audience tonight, with so many UMaine people side-by-side with business professionals, we can see those tangible connections.

It's an important connection, because we recognize that the university's students, faculty expertise and research facilities can be an important draw for companies considering locating in the Bangor region; at the same time, we know that it helps UMaine to be part of a vibrant and thriving community like this one--which really is a great place to live.

As somebody who's excited and optimistic about the University of Maine, I'd like to start tonight by telling you a bit about the great things that are going on here on our beautiful campus.

- Enrollment is at a 15-year high.
- We've seen a 27 percent year-to-year increase in out-of-state first-year enrollment.
- At the same time, the new class has the most in-state students UMaine has ever enrolled.
- Double-digit enrollment increases from southern Maine two years in a row.
- Graduate enrollment is up 17 percent over the past five years, with the number of doctoral students up 28 percent!
- We currently have 396 doctoral students--the most UMaine has ever had.

This is because students and their families recognize outstanding quality and value when they see it.

UMaine offers opportunities that do not exist in one place anywhere else in Maine.

Examples include: undergraduate research, vibrant student community life, a broad range of academic programs.

And it's worth noting what UMaine means to the local and statewide economy; I've used the term "economic engine," and I really think that does apply.

Various facts and figures support that premise, such as the fact that UMaine generates nearly \$7 in economic activity for every dollar of state investment; that we are one of the two largest employers in this area; and that our research is spinning off real businesses that create real jobs.

I like to think that our contribution goes far beyond the financial. It's education, it's engagement with business, it's culture, it's entertainment, it's the way that having a university in a community makes things different, and better.

UMaine is fortunate to enjoy great support, both regionally and statewide.

While there is appropriate concern that voters turned down Question 6, which would have funded renovations at community colleges and the other six universities in the University of Maine System, Nov. 8 was a good day for UMaine.

Question 3, the environmental bond, will provide \$850,000 for our Witter Center, a very student-centered research and teaching facility that works to the benefit of many of Maine's traditional agriculture-based industries.

And the jobs bond, Question 4, provides \$2 million for UMaine's Laboratory for Surface Science and Technology, along with \$1 million for the Graduate School of Biomedical Science.

These are priorities for us, and it is very exciting to see the continued public support for UMaine.

Within the framework of our core reason for being--that is, to provide a high-quality comprehensive and broad-based education for our students--we are seeing a lot of things happen to emphasize the university's role in economic development.

We are very excited about our continuing and emerging relationships with Maine's community colleges, which are more and more creating ways for students who finish associate degrees to move into UMaine, where they can earn a bachelor's degree and move into good jobs and careers.

We are pleased with the professional accomplishments of our graduates, including very often those who have just graduated recently, as they enter the workplace, take good jobs, do them well, and help to move the economy forward.

And it's the Maine economy that benefits. Our data show that 80 percent of Mainers who graduate from UMaine stay in the state for their first job. These are the educated, committed members of the workforce who make a real difference in our ability to attract employers who bring good jobs.

We also look, very carefully, for ways to add appropriately to our curriculum programs and courses that can increase our graduates' skills and ability to contribute in areas where a trained workforce is needed.

With National Semiconductor, we've just created a course in Integrated Circuit Design; engineering students who complete the course and later graduate have a leg up in terms of being prepared to do real and important work in the semiconductor industry. Such courses are very rare at the

undergraduate level, and I was very proud to hear that a National Semiconductor official said that UMaine is one of only a very few places where this kind of course could be created and taught.

Along similar lines, one of the greatest advantages a UMaine student has is the opportunity to participate, even as an undergraduate, in research.

These opportunities put our students on the frontiers of new knowledge, and put them in a position to enter the workplace or move on to graduate school with the skills and knowledge that will make them competitive with students from anywhere.

In our graduate programming, UMaine is working to develop and establish programs, particularly those that are interdisciplinary in nature and collaborative with other institutions, and which can have a real effect on Maine's economy.

Perhaps the most current--and one of the most exciting--examples is the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, which is coming together nicely and will provide the framework for researchers around Maine to compete for biomedical research grants and, more importantly, to bring our creativity, expertise and resources to bear on the problems affecting human health.

The same principles hold true in many research areas, including marine science, composites, nanotechnology and several others.

These growing research areas have potential to help draw companies to the Bangor region.

We know that basic research is important, and that all of our activity must supplement our core mission of turning out graduates who can think critically, communicate effectively and contribute to society in measurable ways.

At the same time, we recognize that a university like UMaine is properly expected to serve the state and larger society, and to help chart the economy of the future.

I spend a lot of time thinking about the university's future, and what I'd like to see it become.

We're beginning to see that future in some of the things that are happening, and I find that exciting.

I just mentioned the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences. That's one example of the new-model land-grant institution that I see UMaine becoming.

By that, I mean an institution that is responsive and engaged, collaborating with other institutions--of all kinds--around Maine to leverage resources and pool creativity and capabilities.

We need to be creative, we need to be bold and we're on that track.

That's why we've started a joint Ph.D./Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine degree with the University of New England.

And we're exploring more similar opportunities with other statewide partners.

We need to make sure that our new initiatives have an impact--on our students and on our state.

We want to be known for our overall quality, and for our good work making our state a better place to live.

More tangible goals include adding about another 500 good students to take us to 12,000; we want 3,000 of them to be graduate students. We want to get to the \$125 million mark in research expenditures--a goal that's now within sight.

And we aim to continue to step up our business development and commercialization activities, spinning out more real businesses that employ real people and make a difference in our economy.

Bill Gates recently spoke to a national conference of state legislators, and he focused on education.

He believes that real economic development is about education. Here's what he said about a segment of the economy with which he is quite familiar-- high-tech industries:

"(They) are far more sensitive to quality of talent than it is about tax incentives. California is not number one because they have the most friendly tax policies there. For areas where the difference is coming up with the breakthrough medicine or not, if you don't come up with it, you're nowhere, and if you do, there's enough money to go around no matter what state you're in."

It's about access to an educated workforce. And that's exactly why we believe UMaine will play a central role in charting the economic course for Maine.

So, how are we going to do this? We need to make the case--and we need your help doing it--that UMaine is a good investment. And that the bigger the investment, the bigger the return will be.

We've developed, through a great faculty group, the framework for a plan that uses research investment to move the state's economy.

It's bold, it's ambitious, and it's something we're convinced will work.

Let's start with this discouraging statistic. According to the National Science Foundation, Maine ranks 50th among states in terms of university R&D investment. Dead last. Clearly, this has to change. Maine is a great place; it should not be last in anything.

- Last year, Maine invested \$10 million, through the Maine Economic Improvement Fund;
- UMaine leveraged an additional \$57 million in federal grants;
- UMaine created 739 new jobs, and built 128,000 square feet of new facilities;
- We served 160 Maine companies, providing vital support and expertise;
- We developed new companies (22 of them since 1998), while developing new patents;
- UMaine has generated more intellectual property than all of the other research institutions in Maine combined.

That's what I call economic development and a good investment!

Even though it lags far behind the goals set by the Legislature in 1998 – spurred on by five of our faculty members who convinced decision-makers that these investments work; and boy were they ever right.

Our new plan, which we will present to the Legislature in January, asks for an additional \$10 million each year, through 2010.

With that, we will begin to catch up to other states, and our economy will be transformed, and it will provide the growth and momentum the state will need for continued growth.

Our plan meshes perfectly with the state's plan; it is consistent with what Maine wants, and it will get us where we all want to go.

We have an underlying, detailed strategy that will help this investment build on itself, and serve the needs of Maine people.

This is not about UMaine; it's about Maine.

This is not a new model; it's worked in many states, including North Carolina and Texas, and it will work here.

We also need to make the case, forcefully and effectively, that the state's base appropriation to its university system needs to be a priority if our research plan is going to work.

We're losing ground, every year, because of inadequate funding.

That means that maintenance is deferred, that some classes have more students in them than we would like, and that our library is unable to keep up with the demands of the information age.

This is a critical problem, and it's getting worse. The biggest reason it bothers me is because of our students. We're committed to their success, and it's hard to ensure that when we don't have the adequate resources to create and to fix the things that they notice most.

R&D is critical; it will set the course for our economic future. But it won't work unless we have the well-rounded, well-educated members of society who are prepared to contribute in meaningful ways. And adequate funding is necessary to make that happen. We're working hard to be efficient and effective in all of our operations--we have a list of energy saving initiatives that's very impressive and as long as my arm--but we need help.

I recognize that times are tough in Maine. And I'm committed to helping find the solutions that will make things better. That's why I'm convinced that an investment in UMaine will pay bigger dividends, faster, than anything else the state can do.

And we're doing our part, too. We're about to begin the largest fundraising campaign--at least \$150 million--in UMaine's history.

That's a lot of money, and we will use it wisely--investing most of it in people, through scholarships, professorships and the things that will sustain our faculty and student excellence.

And when we use money for buildings, we'll renovate, rather than build new--when we can.

We've thought about this a lot – about how to make it effective and impactful, and I'm committed to making it happen.

To get where we need to be, we must be successful in both the private fundraising and in gaining increased public financial support; these efforts will complement each other, and they will create the momentum that will carry us to a brighter future.

It's a matter of being bold, and aggressive. UMaine is a great place, and we're going to make it better.

And it's worth repeating--this is not about UMaine; it's about Maine.

Our plans are coming together and we have the ability and initiative to achieve our goals. We hope you agree that we're on the right track, and help us to reach those goals.

Back to Speeches

The Office of the President
5703 Alumni Hall, Suite 200
Orono, ME 04469

Phone: (207) 581-1512 | Fax: (207) 581-1517

The University of Maine, Orono, Maine 04469
207-581-1110
A Member of the University of Maine System