

December 17, 2022

Testimony in Opposition to LD 3:

An Act to Establish the Winter Energy Relief Payment Program to Aid Residents with High Heating Costs and to Finalize the COVID Pandemic Relief Payment Program

President Jackson, Speaker Talbot Ross, and members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs:

I am writing this testimony in opposition to LD 3, "An Act to Establish the Winter Energy Relief Payment Program to Aid Residents with High Heating Costs and to Finalize the COVID Pandemic Relief Payment Program." My name is Nathan Gould, and I am a lifelong resident of the Town of Winterport. I recognize and commend the desire to assist the working families of Maine and seniors living on Social Security, but I believe more care and consideration should be taken with the taxpayers' treasure, especially with this half-billion dollar proposal.

Much has been said about the urgency of the issue LD 3 attempts to address and how immediate action is needed. Representative Thorne reminded the Legislature, on Swearing-in Day, December 7, of the 81st anniversary of the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. History tells us of intercepted and decrypted transmissions, acquired prior to the strike, that warned of an imminent attack by the Empire of Japan.

The threat that LD 3 intends to meet has had much clearer, more obvious warning: no interception of communications is needed to tell us of winter's approach, and with it decreasing temperatures. We have centuries of experience living in Maine and the cold—sometimes brutal—winters that entails. No deciphering is required to see the impact on fuel prices resulting from the Keystone XL pipeline's cancellation, policies hostile to the oil industry, and the fallout from America's weakening geopolitical position resulting from the withdrawal from Afghanistan which, as I and many others believe, emboldened Russia to pursue the pointless and tragic war against Ukraine, further destabilizing economies around the world. This winter's fuel shortage is no sudden strike; this urgency was quite avoidable.

With all of this forewarning, why didn't the 130th Legislature hold a special session? Further, I fail to see the merits of hastily spending these half-billion dollars if the Low Income Housing Energy Assistance Program is fully funded through July 2023, and the Maine Department of Health and Human Services plans to send one-time payments of \$500 to approximately 13,000 households, as announced

on December 7, 2022. We should utilize what tools are already in place. For instance, at the Winterport Town Council Meeting, held on December 13 of this year, a largely untouched fund for fuel assistance was brought up. Other municipalities may have similar funds.

If this is truly an emergency, surely this warrants giving the people of Maine a break on sales, income, or fuel tax, allowing them to take home more of their paycheck. A check worth one fuel fill up does not increase supply, but exorbitant spending does exhaust taxpayer money.

Ambassador Rahm Emanuel's remarks made during a conference sponsored by the *Wall Street Journal* in 2008 have often been quoted: "You never want a serious crisis to go to waste." This seems to be the modus operandi for many politicians, in a manner that seems altruistic yet incautious at best, banefully opportunistic at worst.

I see little value in disparaging proponents of the bill with claims of conspiracy; likewise it is unhelpful to construe calls for fiscal responsibility as "hating old people" and "only caring about the wealthy." Rather, it is my hope that the Committee, regardless of political affiliation, will work to secure the unalienable right of the pursuit of happiness for not just the constituency of today, but for that voiceless class of people: those generations yet to be born.

I hope Democrats will exercise the compassion on which they frequently campaign and not saddle future Mainers with the burden of debt, stealing their economic freedom and independence. I hope Republicans will follow through on their claims to champion fiscal responsibility, and not allow future generations to be born into bondage—for debt is a species of slavery and hinders liberty—and to not tax those who aren't yet represented. I hope all legislators will remember to uphold that principle held by our Founders: the destructive nature of debt, tantamount to subjugation by conquest. To quote George Washington:

No pecuniary consideration is more urgent than the regular redemption and discharge of the public debt; on none can delay be more injurious, or an economy of time more valuable.

—Washington's Fifth Annual Message to Congress, December 3, 1793

We must have the courage to endure the pain of withdrawal rather than deepen our destructive dependency on debt, if not for ourselves then for our posterity. We must not let surpluses preclude financial responsibility or blind us to increasing debt; we must be aware of underfunded facilities, like nursing homes, that rely on the money taken from Medicaid by this bill; and we must take the utmost care with our fellow Mainer's money, for Maine families and businesses already struggle under this state's tax burden. When people are given freedom to work hard and succeed, they are better enabled to be generous and exercise compassion of their own free will. Let the government give the people the opportunity to fulfill, by their own desire and not by coercion, what Christ told a lawyer was the second of the two great commandments: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

As for me, I do not want a handout. I trust God for provision, for the Author of our rights and of liberty is a better provider than any temporal government.

Please also consider that some sections of the bill should be considered as their own bill, such as Section A-3, regarding the Emergency Housing Relief Fund. There are issues that can be solved independent of each other. I believe this would be a step towards transparency and strengthening constituents' confidence in the legislative process, rather than throwing together several issues into one bill.

I ask the Committee to vote Ought Not To Pass. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this lengthy testimony, and I thank you for your time.

Respectfully,

Nathan C Gould

Winterport