

Good morning.

My name is John Coleman, and I'm proud to say I was raised right here in Augusta, Maine. I went to Lincoln Elementary, then onto Lou Buker Middle School, and Cony High School. In 4th grade I was diagnosed with learning disabilities and dyslexia, and I had special help through all three of those schools. Because the taxpayers of Maine showed up for me. That support allowed me to do something that felt impossible—go to college. I earned a degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Maine, spent 7 years working in big tech, and at 30, I took a wild leap and founded an ad agency called VIA in Portland. And what a ride that was—building a company that created hundreds of jobs, earned national recognition, and, yes, ultimately made me a wealthy man.

And that's why I'm standing here today. I am the person who would pay the taxes being proposed. And I would do so happily—and proudly. Because I believe in paying forward the same kind of opportunities I received. When Maine taxpayers invest in Maine children, we all benefit.

And I believe wealthy people benefit disproportionately higher from taxes well invested in public education. I am a capitalist through and through—I have worked with hundreds of companies selling everything from Klondike Bars to Arm & Hammer Baking Soda, from Fairchild Semiconductors to Maidenform Bras—I've seen firsthand that companies thrive when their employees are well-educated, secure, and supported. And these companies need educated, well-off consumers who have the means to buy the products we're selling. When everyone has enough, the whole system works better.

We have to get beyond this trope that "taxes are always bad". That's just not true, taxes can be the greatest investment any of us can make. Especially when those dollars are deployed by caring responsible political leaders. There's a French proverb I deeply believe: *"Enough is better than too much."* I have more than enough now, and I believe when you reach that point, you give back so others can have enough. But beyond personal belief, I also think it's just good business.

There's also the reality that extreme inequality harms society as a whole. When the gap between the rich and everyone else grows too wide, it creates instability—socially and economically. Investing in education, healthcare, and public services isn't just about fairness; it's about preserving the fabric of a society where everyone has a chance to succeed.

It has been painful to watch the current administration tear down the Department of Education. I believe it is short sighted and will damage America's global competitiveness. We also know that will mean less money will be coming to Maine to help educate our kids. That will weaken our market competitiveness and that's bad for our economy and our way of life. Wealthy people need to step up now to make sure our educational system doesn't suffer. At the end of the day, I want to live in a state that's generous, not greedy. A state where we invest in our people and give them the chance to succeed. I believe policies like these will lead to a better Maine—a Maine where everyone has enough. And isn't that the way life should be?

Thank you very much.