



Mike Tipping
Senator, District 8

THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and honorable members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

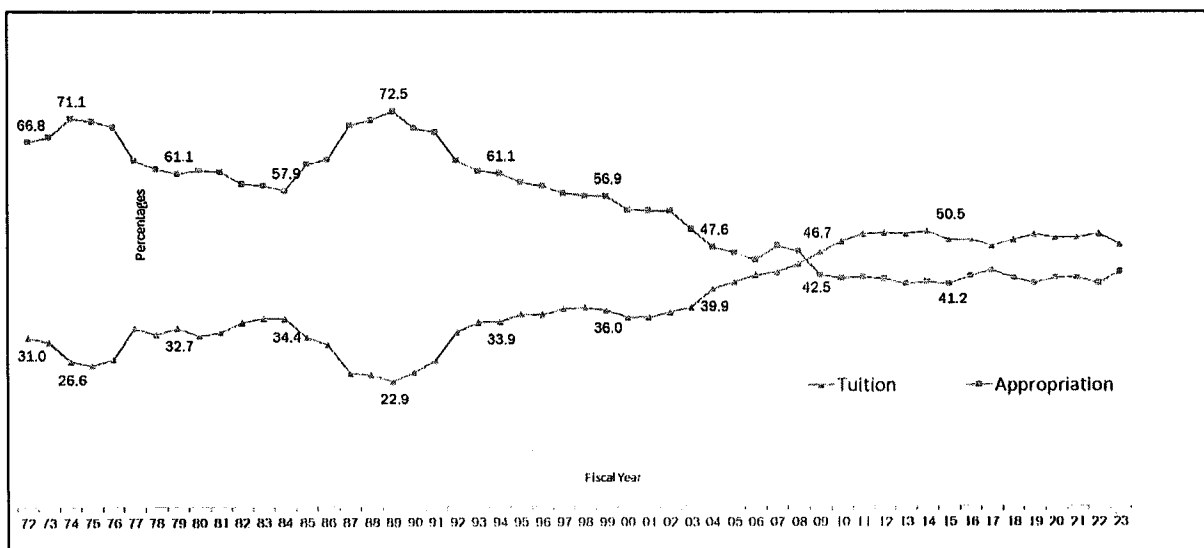
My name is Mike Tipping, I represent Senate District 8 in Penobscot County and I'm proud to present two bills to finally restore needed funding to the University of Maine System:

LD 1219, An Act to Increase State Funding for the Campuses of the University of Maine System and to Raise the Minimum Hourly Wage for Employees of the System

LD 1533, An Act to Ensure the Retention of R1 Research Institution Status by the University of Maine

In 1969, one of the greatest bipartisan efforts in the history of the Maine legislature was accomplished. Republicans and Democrats in both chambers came together with Governor Ken Curtis to pass a Republican bill to create Maine's first progressive income tax, with much of the funding going specifically to fund higher education and secure the future of our state. When it was challenged by a repeal referendum the next year, Maine people voted overwhelmingly to keep paying the tax and keep funding our schools, 75% to 25%.

Over the decades since, however, Maine has steadily underfunded its public universities, leading to higher tuition and less investment in young people, research and our collective future. In 1990, the state provided more than 70% of funding for the University of Maine System. Now, it's around 40%.



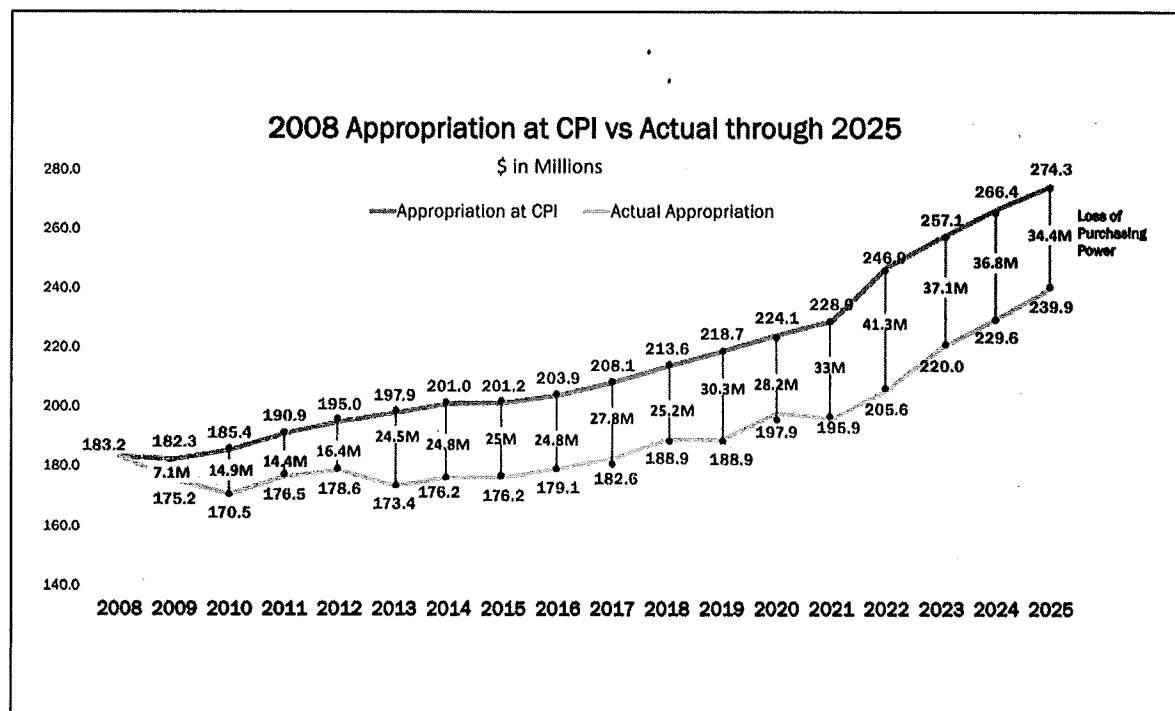
In recent weeks, this has been compounded by the actions of the federal government - both general cuts to educational grants and specific targeting of the University of Maine.

Yesterday, we stood in joint session and in two languages honored Professor Susan Pinette for her achievements as Director of the Franco American Centre at the University of Maine. What wasn't said was that last month, the Centre lost the federal grant that funds most of its work.

The same story is repeating all over the campuses of the UMaine system most of the cuts, recissions and denials haven't yet made the news.

At the end of March, The University of Maine announced that it was pausing all financial offers for graduate students for the upcoming academic year, including all paid research and teaching assistantships.

I deeply appreciate the commitment by Governor Janet Mills in her proposed budget to increase funding for the University of Maine by 4%. That's an important step in the right direction, but we should be clear that it doesn't make up for even the rate of inflation we've seen in recent years, much less this historic underfunding.



The two bills before you are attempts to begin to address the underfunding of our universities in two ways that I believe fit well with the goals of this committee and our state and would make a real difference in preserving and expanding the greatest engines of opportunity that we possess in Maine.



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LD 1219 would increase state funding to UMS to the same level, per-student, as peer institutions currently receive from their states – an increase of an estimated \$14 million next fiscal year and \$24 million for the following fiscal year. It would also set a minimum wage for university employees at 125% of the state minimum wage.

This would meet vital current needs and bring Maine more in line with other states in funding our public universities while making sure those investments positively benefit the communities that host our campuses by creating jobs that Mainers can live on.

LD 1533 would provide around \$8 million over two years to fund enough graduate students through their academic careers to meet UMaine's PhD graduation commitment to keep R1 research status. Grad students are often the first to suffer from cutbacks and their work is essential to the future of UMaine.

I don't need to tell this committee how important it was for UMaine to achieve R1 status in 2022. The university has long spent enough on research to meet the threshold, but it was a post-COVID boost in PhD graduations that put us over the top. Now, those graduation rates are decreasing and the grants that fund these students are threatened.

Both measures, along with my previous bill before this committee on Pell Grant students, target money to where it is needed most - the students, faculty and staff that make our universities our best hope for improving the lives and futures of Maine people. For every problem our state is facing, from the number of nurses to potato yields to helping young Mainers stay here and raise their families, our public universities offer solutions.

I would urge this committee to support both these proposals and to make increased funding for our public universities a top priority for the biennial budget.

Thank you for your consideration and I'd be happy to answer any questions.