

# MORE THAN 200 JOBS WOULD BE CUT UNDER LEPAGE'S PROPOSED BUDGET

BY GLENN ADAMS  
Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Maine — Gov. Paul LePage's administration on Friday presented a proposed \$6.3 billion budget that eliminates more than 200 state positions, seeks to share the state's teacher retirement costs with local school districts, and makes changes in the state welfare system to address an expected \$40 million reduction in federal matching funds.

While the Republican governor said his two-year budget takes steps toward "rightsizing state government" amid "challenging and difficult times," Democrats and teachers were quick to pounce on portions they see as a tax shift from state to local taxpayers.

"This budget is a giant shell game. It shifts the cost and the burden to towns and local school districts, hurting middle class homeowners," said Lois Kilby-Chesley, teacher and president of the Maine Education Association.

LePage did not appear at the State House budget briefing, but he released a statement saying his spending plan "balances priorities for the people of Maine by maintaining the crucial safety net for our most vulnerable while holding the line on our already too high tax burden." The budget, which covers the fiscal cycle starting July 1, now faces legislative review in the months ahead.

It seeks to increase property tax breaks for older Mainers in two programs, and temporarily suspend municipal revenue sharing. It also proposes rollbacks in some social programs, such as discontinuing state-funded cash assistance for legal non-citizens who are not entitled to Social Security Income benefits. The budget seeks to maintain funding for state colleges and universities, a provision that pleased University of Maine System Chancellor James Page.

"The appropriation levels



AP PHOTO

At the State House in Augusta, Maine, on Friday, state Sen. Justin Alfond, D-Portland, questions spending cuts outlined by the Appropriations Committee.

recommended by Governor LePage, if approved by the Legislature, position the University of Maine System to again freeze tuition, this time for each of the two next academic years," Page said in a statement.

The budget, just a under \$6.3 billion, is slightly larger than the current budget, which now stands at \$6.1 billion. Eighty percent of the total is consumed by two departments — Education and Health and Human Services — with Education accounting for 45 percent and Human Services taking 35 percent. Of the 200 state positions targeted for elimination, more than half are in the Transportation Department.

During a briefing for legislative leaders and reporters, Finance Commissioner Sawin Millett, who's been in state government or close to it for several decades, called the proposal "one of the more difficult budgets I've dealt with."

"The difference here today is we don't have those low-hanging fruit options. ... We're basically out of the easy-button options," said the commissioner, who faced a volley of questions from legislative leaders. While the easy options are gone, administration officials

also are faced with diminishing federal stimulus money and increased use of human services programs by people already enrolled in them.

Senate President Justin Alfond was focused on what he estimated would be a tax shift of about \$400 million to local communities.

"That is obviously a concern to all of us around the table because we all come here representing our communities, and that's a tremendous amount of money to be taking from them in this budget," the Portland Democrat said.

Republican lawmakers acknowledged the budget would force painful choices, but they claimed it would protect the disabled and elderly as well as make investments to move the economy forward.

"I appreciate that you are bringing forward a budget that does not include a tax increase," House GOP Leader Ken Fredette of Newport told Millett.

Legislators' immediate challenge will be revising the spending outline for the fiscal year that will end June 30. The supplemental budget accounts for nearly \$90 million in extra obligations for Medicaid, shrinking federal matches for social programs and revenue estimates showing \$35.5 million less than anticipated due to the sluggish economy.

To balance the books, budget writers scaled back existing programs, delayed school funding payments from June to July, and made other income saving changes.



DEB CRAM/DCRAM@SEACOASTONLINE.COM

Board members of the Seacoast Chapter of the Veterans Count Club held their first meeting Friday. Front: Bill Schuler, Deb Grott, Darci Knowles, Mark Sullivan, David Hampson, retired Col. Rick Greenwood, Greg Whalen, Paul O'Neil, Mark Jacobsohn. Back: Doug Bates, Dick Martell, Rick Courtemanche, Bill Bogdon, Renee Riedel-Plummer.

## VETERANS: 'Urgent response unit' needed

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the Seacoast.

Plans to expand the support service were revealed last year at the inaugural Veterans Count Club breakfast fund-raiser at the Sheraton Portsmouth Harborside. The event featured veterans from most military branches, members of the local private sector, and local and state elected officials. It was the first time the group had gathered in Portsmouth.

Friday's meeting was among the first for members of the Seacoast group's board of directors.

Members of the club's board of directors include Mark Sullivan, Rick Courtemanche, Mark Jacobsohn, Darci Knowles, retired Col. Dick Martell, Dan Morrison, Paul O'Neil, David Hampson, Bill Bogdon, Rick Wallis and Greg Whalen.

Other members include retired Gen. Kenneth Clark, retired Col. Rick Greenwood, Renee Riedel-Plummer, Doug Bates and Lisa Sirak of Easter Seals of New Hampshire.

As the chairman of the board, Sullivan said the new local effort will be designed to help the many men and women who live in the Seacoast and serve their country.

With a grandfather who served in World War I, a father who served in World War II and a son who is currently serving in the Persian Gulf, Sullivan

said it's important not to take for granted the men and women who ensure the safety of Americans each and every day.

"There's just so much that's not being done, not only for the members of the military, but also the families they leave behind," Sullivan said.

He said the new club will not only focus its efforts on helping soldiers when they return home with potential employment opportunities, but also through the day-to-day issues they encounter while getting settled. Financial support offered to military members through the program may include, but is not limited to, transportation, housing, rent, fuel assistance, utilities, vehicle repair, gasoline, food, child care, tuition and medical expenses.

"It could be something like getting food in the fridge for them or helping them get their car back on the road," Sullivan said.

He said many assistance programs available to returning service members involve a lot of red tape and waiting. Sullivan said he's hoping the new club will expedite requests for help.

"There's just no urgent response unit available to them," he said. "That's what we are."

Having been stationed at the Pease Air Force Base, Greenwood said there was once a local program called the Honorary Commanders Group that helped military members in a similar fashion to how the Vet-

erans Count Club does today.

But when the Air Force base closed in the early 1990s, Greenwood said the support program ended.

Since that time, Greenwood said people on the Seacoast have been eager to find ways to help support the local contingent of servicemen and service-women.

"The Seacoast has always been a strong supporter of the military," he said. "People have been anxious and wanting to do this, they want to reach out and they want to help, they just didn't know how."

Greenwood, who lives in Stratham, said that support service has returned in the form of the Veterans Count Club.

"There's a huge pent-up demand in terms of need, and there's a lot of people out there that want to help," he said.

Among the topics discussed during Friday's kick-off meeting was a fund-raising event the group is planning to hold at the Service Credit Union Headquarters in Portsmouth on Armed Forces Day, May 18.

Riedel-Plummer said while plans are in the early stages, the fund-raiser promises to be a unique event featuring many members of the military, both past and present.

Anyone interested in attending or learning more about the program can contact Mark Sullivan at 766-1955 or msullivan@seacoastassetmgt.com.

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## ROLLIE: Will be home tonight if recovery goes well

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resting comfortably at the veterinary hospital.

His back leg is swollen and lacerated, but an X-ray did not indicate a big break, Meg Nichols said. He did suffer a tear in one of his lungs, she said.

"We were just lucky he did not have a (serious) internal injury," she said.

If all goes well, Rollie will be home tonight, she said.

At 22 months, Rollie appears to have many more years to participate in one of his favorite activities, grabbing a log from the wood pile to carry around.

"We have a cat that may be a little disappointed he's home," Meg Nichols said.

The couple got Rollie as a puppy from a breeder in Bangor.

On Wednesday at about 7:30 a.m., a dog walker had Rollie on a leash on Organug Road when the German shepherd spotted a squirrel and took off, breaking his collar, according to York Animal Control Officer Larry McAfee.

Rollie ran across Organug Road, and was hit by a truck heading south, McAfee said. The truck did not stop. The dog took off onto the grounds of the nearby York Golf & Tennis Club, and apparently kept run-



RICH BEAUCHESNE/RBEAUCHESNE@SEACOASTONLINE.COM

Meg Nichols sits with Rollie, who has multiple injuries and is now recovering at the Port City Veterinary Referral Hospital in Portsmouth.

ning. No one could find him.

So started a search that involved the family, McAfee, Kittery Police Officer Jay Durgin and his K-9 partner, and at least 40 volunteers. Rollie's photo and status on Facebook had many in York on the lookout for the wounded German shepherd.

"I couldn't believe people came with their own dogs in search of our dog," Meg Nichols said. "I was just struck by the support. People were out there, eight, 10 hours a day."

On Friday around 6 a.m., Nichols was ready to start another day of searching.

"In the dark this morning, I was trying to think, 'Where would he go today?'" she said.

Nichols never thought Rollie would go as far as Cape Neddick, she said, but Durgin was already checking the area of Chases Pond Road off Mountain Road.

Around 8:30 a.m., she got the call from her husband reporting that Rollie had been found. The

couple knew it was their dog from a distinctive mark on his tongue, she said.

David and Meg's daughter, Coco Nichols, who is in medical school in Portland, spent every spare moment searching for Rollie.

"Thank God he's alive," Coco said Friday.

Meg Nichols is thankful to all who participated in the search, and grateful to the good Samaritan who stopped to pick up Rollie. She said she knew neighbors and residents would be there to help if she was in need, but people went above and beyond anything she could imagine.

"We live in a special community," she said. "I've lived in York a long time and never realized it."

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