

Distinguished Honors Graduate Lecture - Diversity in Maine: An Opportunity

TIAA/CREF Distinguished Honors Graduate Lecture

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James E. Tierney '69

Former Attorney General of Maine

Diversity in Maine: An Opportunity

Tonight I'll be talking about Diversity in Maine

Because census figures depict us as the least diverse state in the country, it is a topic that doesn't get to the top of the Maine agenda very often, but I'll do what I can.

I am afraid that too often this discussion is mixed with a number of observations that, frankly, are not helpful ...diversity issues get mixed up with politics and views of government and religion and history....and guilt or lack of guilt.....

I do not think that any of that is especially helpful to a clear eyed analysis of the issue, so I am not going to talk about them.

And I am not going to talk about diversity in the context of "doing the right thing..." or "affirmative action" ... or "doing our part to help refugees..."

All of that is important, but in my opinion largely misses the point.

I am also not going to lash out at any institution or person “for not doing enough.” Our current situation isn’t anyone’s “fault” and blame doesn’t move the agenda along.

What I will do is to avail myself of the luxury of no longer being in public life.

I am going to be blunt. I’m going to look at the numbers.

My primary message of tonight is that – regardless of diversity – Maine Needs People.

We certainly need to keep our young people here and lure some of them back, but that is not enough.

We need people to move here – from other places in the United States and from other countries in the world.

Now, you wouldn’t know that by reading the newspapers.

The northern half of the state says “no way...we don’t have enough jobs as it is! Immigrants and refugees will take our social services....save those jobs for our own kids.....” (hold up Bangor Daily News of 3/27/02 with headline “Hundreds of Mainers to lose jobs.”)

The southern half of the state says “no way...we have sprawl...our roads are packed ... our schools are overcrowded and we need new ones we can’t afford...we don’t need more people!....” (hold up Portland Press Herald

of 3/27/02 with headline “Winter a Hot One for Maine housing: Sales of homes surge 18% as interest rates and unemployment stay low.”)

And you wouldn’t know it by talking to your middle class neighbors most of whom are working and pretty happy about living here in Maine.

But talk to everyone from the Governor on-down – as I did recently at a friend’s wedding – and pretty soon we are talking about how much we miss our kids and wish they’d come home.

And you wouldn’t know about Maine needing more people from talking to anyone running for office. I do not expect my message tonight to be picked up by anyone who is running for anything. In the words of former President Bush, “it wouldn’t be prudent.”

I am arguing that Maine needs more people.

I say this fully aware that for most of us of my generation – which is the generation that dominates Maine and country right now – more people does not mean a better life. It means more cars and more houses dotting our pristine landscapes and more people we don’t know with strange ways that can be unsettling.

Worded in another way, too many of us want progress, but we don’t want change.

So, if you are my age, I fully expect that your defense mechanisms are fully engaged this evening.

But if you are younger, I bet you'll be sitting there nodding your head. You already "get it" and understand the seriousness of the problem.

Let's look at what our state will look like without some kind of demographic change.

2000 Census statistics state that Maine was 46th in growth between 1990 and 2000 – 1.3% per year or an average of only 2,040 a year. (We grew less between 1990 and 2000 than any state other than North Dakota, West Virginia, Pennsylvania and Connecticut. Maine's total growth rate for the decade was 3.8% or 0.38% a year.) *[In Maine, from 2015-2020 there is only an expected growth rate of 0.1% and between 2020-2025 there is actually an expected growth rate of negative 0.1%]*

But within those figures is a far more important factor than raw growth figures...

We have aged.

In 1980, Maine was the 12th oldest state. In 1990, we were the 8th oldest. By 2000, we are the 4th oldest state in the country. *[Now we are the oldest state in the country]* From 1990 to 2000, our median age jumped nearly 5 years – to 38.6. *[The median age has increased over the course of only four years based on demographics from 2010 to 2013 and over fourteen years has increased from 38.6 years to 43.9 years. Maine is among several states with the "largest increase in median age over the past ten years."]*

From 1990 to 2000, our youngest age bracket dropped from 85,000 to 70,000. (A preliminary estimate suggests that the net out flow (in migrants minus out migrants) between 1990 and 2000 of persons who were age 10 to 21 in 1990 and 20 to 31 in 2000 approached 16% of the cohort. There appears to have been net inflows during this same period of persons under age 20 and over age 31 in 2000.)

Our birthrate is at the lowest level since the state first began keeping statistics in 1892.

Now let me really scare you.

It is going to get worse.

Growth projections between 2000 and 2025 we see Maine gaining almost 200,000 people even as we drop from 39th in population to 42nd. [*The State Economist, Amanda Rector, projects that by 2030, "Maine's population will be around the same as it is today yet will be much older since the youngest baby boomers by then will all be older than 65." According to Portland Press Herald.*]

The issue for us, however, is not the growth per se but the profile of the state's population.

By 2025, it is predicted that we will see an increase of 28% of Mainers between 45 and 64 ... 97% between 65 and 74 ... 28% between 75 and 84 (my category) and 14% over 85. [*There have been significantly more individuals between the age group of 45-65 over the past four years compared to*

those under 18. This group will continue to become older and ultimately expand the age group of 65 and over.]

Today, 14% are today over the age of 65. (We will have ten years of no change due to the birth rates during the depression and WWII. But then, in 2011, that world will change.) By 2025, that percentage will be 21%. *[In Maine in 2010, 27% of the overall population was 55 and over. In 2013, 18% of the population was over the age of 65.]*

In some parts of Maine that figure will be much worse.

Now let's look at the other end of the age categories:

- Between now and 2025, there will be a decrease in every category under the age of 45
- 1995 to 2025, the per cent of Maine people under 20 will drop from 27% to 22% *[In 2013, the percent of Maine people under 18 was about 19% and this percent has been decreasing since 2010]*
- In 1995, Maine was ranked 42nd among states in its proportion of people under 20. *[But today we are the second state with the lowest percentage of people under 18.]*
- From 1997 to 2009, we are predicting to see a 9% drop in elementary students and 11% in high schools. Whereas the northeast will see a 20% increase in high school graduates between 1997 and 2009, we will see a decrease of 3%.

And for those of you who know this state, let me tell you about how small we are already!

This year's Eastern Maine Basketball Championship game for Class A was between Cony and Brunswick. Got that?

Now, there is always talk about bringing jobs to Maine...and creating jobs in Maine...and helping employers in Maine.

This year – when we elect a new Governor - won't be any different.

But let's think about the impact of the numbers I am discussing and diversity has on the job debate.

Employers who want to invest in Maine will look at these numbers.

Regardless of the “business climate” – the tax rate, the Workers Comp fees and all the rest – these numbers send a clear message to anyone interested in long term investment strategies.

Employers will see those numbers and realize that the Maine's governmental structure will have to meet the needs of an aging population at the expense of other expenditures.

An aging state must spend money on Medicaid, prescription drug programs, assisted living and a host of other age related matters.

This means we will have less money to spend in other areas.

In education, which is essential for economic development, Mainers pay 13% of our earnings in taxes compared to 10% nationally, but still rank 49th as to the per cent of our budgets that are spent on higher education. We spend \$161 per capita on higher education compared to \$260 per capita of those states with similar demographics. *[Maine would lose \$137 million in economic activity and about 1,080 jobs if all unauthorized immigrants were removed.]*

Help me envision the employer will say “that is where I want to invest for the long haul. Who will say “Maine is where I want to be!”

I can do that for some regions of Maine – since these numbers are not consistent from York to Fort Kent – but you can fill in the gaps yourself for those areas where the aging/out-migration is most acute.

We are reducing the number of young people at the exact time that the elderly population is exploding.

We are not isolated in all this.

The truth is that Maine’s figures are not all that different from the statistics of the white population of the rest of the country and indeed the world.

Let me repeat that.

The demographics of white Maine citizens do not differ dramatically from the demographics of most white Americans.

The growth...the energy...the youth...the future of our nation is increasingly in those communities of people that don't live in Maine.

The states that are our county's engines of economic growth – California, New York, Florida, Arizona, Texas, Washington – are states that are culturally diverse and becoming more so.

And while diversity comes in all colors, we cannot ignore the fact that Maine is the whitest state in the country.

Let me share with you the scope of that statistic.

30.9% of U.S. residents in 2000 identify themselves as non-white. In Maine, only 3.5% so identify. That means 1 in 3 in the United States compared with 1 in 30 in Maine.

Statistics at USM – our “urban campus” – show that of 11,000 students, 330 are of “minority” – whatever that means.

An estimated 11.1% of U.S. residents in the year 2000 were foreign born. In Maine, only 3.1% are foreign born – most of whom are Canadian.

What to do?

I am an optimist. I think that the world is not immutable. I know that Maine people have great resilience. I know that we have a terrific and tolerant state that reflects values that make us attractive.

I know that we can grab on to our own destinies.

But for all of that, we do have to admit some facts.

First, we have to admit that this is a problem.

Second, we must come to grips we need more people. There is no other answer to our problems.

And Third, we need a statewide strategy.

It isn't that we haven't tried.

The usual strategies – keeping young people here, bringing our kids back home; and building more retirement communities – all are just fine.

But we have to be honest and – although it isn't anyone's "fault" – admit that we haven't been all that successful and, even if we had, those strategies aren't enough.

It is my position that the most promising of these two efforts – keeping our kids and bringing them home – are damaged by our lack of diversity.

1. Keep our young people

We know that the statistics are terrible.

We also know that most of this follows the economy – there is no question about that – and it is my view that a lack of diversity hurts job creation which creates the spiral that results in more kids leaving.

But focusing on job creation in order "to keep our kids here" misses much of the story. This isn't just about jobs.

If we listen to young people who have gone, they will tell you it is not just about jobs.

Many of our best Maine kids move away – perhaps for education or perhaps for work – and find a level of energy and excitement elsewhere – in places where diversity is the rule and not the exception.

And they like it.

Let me tell you about the party we had at our house just this last Saturday.

It was to celebrate the graduation from Tufts Medical School of a young man who grew up with my kids and is the child of two friends from my days here at the University of Maine. He is a part of my family.

He is from Lisbon and Auburn and sailed through medical school picking up a Master's in Public Health along the way so that he could carry out his lifelong dream of practicing community based medicine here in Maine. Just 3 months ago, he did a rotation visiting our islands – in the middle of winter.

But life isn't always that clear. For the last two years, he has been in a serious relationship with a classmate. And his classmate is now starting her residency in Emergency Medicine – and she decided to do it in Los Angeles. Why? Well, she is an Asian-American and she wants to be around men and women who share her heritage.

Do any of you blame her? I certainly don't. So they are packing their bags today and leaving for L/A tomorrow morning.

Our lack of diversity may have not caused us to lose one doctor, but two doctors. And as we know, the health care that they will provide throughout their careers not only saves lives, but is an essential element to any plan for rural economic development..

And I feel it, too. Even at the age of 55.

I went to the U. Me. Law School. I am grateful I got the chance. I give them money. I spoke at their commencement. But I have chosen to teach at Columbia – in part – because I cannot imagine teaching a class of all white students. It just wouldn't be as much fun for me

So I don't.....

2. Bringing our own kids back.

Again, we need jobs to attract our kids back to all the wonders of our state, but again this is not entirely about jobs.

I have two brothers. Both were raised in Maine. One lives in New York and the other in Texas. Neither of them need jobs, and both sometimes talk about coming back home.

My brother John is a youthful 59 and lives on Long Island, New York. He is about to retire from INS to go into teaching. He actually has a house in Brunswick, but he isn't

going to come because his wife is from Costa Rica and she and her kids aren't about to become the only folks in town who are Hispanic.

And then there is my younger brother, David, who has done "very well" – as they say – in the computer industry in Austin. He isn't coming, either, in part because his wife is from the Philippines and, well, you get the picture.

3. Retirement industry

Governor's initiative to bring more retirees to Maine.

I'm just going to let that pass on that one.

4. Diversity

So now let's talk about diversity issue in Maine..

The truth is that Maine has become homogenized.

We are significantly less diverse state than we were 100 years ago. The Maine I grew up in had more diversity than the Maine that exists today. When I was a kid, there were stores in Brunswick where French was spoken as the primary language. That certainly isn't true today.

We have to do better.

But aren't we really afraid? Aren't we a little afraid of people who aren't like us?...

This isn't new. In the 19th century, the "No Nothing" movement didn't like the Bangor Irish so they burned St. John's Catholic while it was being built.

A few years later, it was the Bangor Irish who fought the coming of the Canadian's to work in the woods.

We all know of Maine's sad KKK heritage in the 1920's and the 1930's.

We are not so different from our ancestors.

September 11 wasn't the first time in our history when we became afraid of foreign threats on our soil....

So, good and bad, the human spirit doesn't change all that much...

And just maybe we've forgotten that Ed Muskie, George Mitchell, Joe Brennan and even Jim Tierney are the sons of immigrants.

And that Bill Cohen and Olympia Snowe and John Baldacci are the grandchildren of immigrants.

Some legal. Some illegal. But immigrants.

Maybe we don't want to remember our rich immigrant heritage, but we should because but it has made us the wonderful of state we are today.

Our excuses for lack of diversity don't cut it. There are many and I hear them all the time.

The one I love is the weather. “No one will live here because of the weather. They wouldn’t be happy. It is too cold.”

I was in St. Paul Minnesota a couple weeks ago for the Minnesota v. UMaine hockey game after having been invited by former Minnesota Attorney General Hubert “Skip” Humphrey who had a free seat – in the Minnesota section!. As we were driving around before the game – with me wearing my blue and white “Maine” hockey jersey – I told him about how I was struggling to draft the remarks I am giving tonight.

Skip told me about the Hmong people who have been living in Minnesota for 25 years. From the Laotian mountains, they had supported us in the Vietnam war at the CIA’s urging and were left desperate as a result of our loss.

They moved all over the United States, but the largest groupings ended up eventually in Minnesota – hardly an environment that reminded them of home.

The trauma of their lives has been told elsewhere, but Minnesota realized that the arrival of these brave people was a good thing for their state.

Now, that view was not unanimous There have been years of very, very hard times with unemployment at times over 50%. The families are very large. There was crime. There were burdens on the social structure.

There were huge cultural differences as the Hmong lack a written tradition.

But today there are 60,000 Hmong in Minneapolis/St. Paul. There are 800 businesses. There is Hmong Chamber of Commerce. There is a Hmong Bar Assoc. There are doctors. There are dentists.

And there is a new St. Senator. – Mee Moua – who with her Brown and U. of Minn. Law degree – is a political leader in her state.

I talked to her this afternoon. She told that in Minnesota – and around the country – that new entrants begin by moving into the most blighted areas of a community, but that within years their efforts result in a resurgence. She urged me to visit University Avenue in St. Paul and Nicolet Avenue in Minneapolis to see for myself. As a leader of her community, she is constantly being approached by Minnesota business anxious to connect with her constituents.

She told me that Hmong home ownership percentages now exceed that of most Minnesotans.

And to get there, she spoke of basic programs – Accessible adult education; strong bi-lingual traditions and respect for multiculturalism – and a small business tradition that is respected.

Maine has all of these things.

And the Hmong call Minnesota home. And it is just as cold in Minnesota as it is in Maine.

Minnesota understands that its economic future is tied to promoting diversity.

So, what do we do here in Maine?

First, we admit the importance of diversity to our future. And we talk about it. My real goal tonight is not to find solutions so much as to talk about the issue that is right in front of us that we are ignoring.

Second, we start looking at the in-migration that is occurring in a few places in Maine and see it as a positive – no, essential – step to improving our state’s future.

We must see immigration as an opportunity instead of a burden for one or two municipalities.

We have to do better.

We roll up our sleeves and start making changes.

#1. Maine has no one-stop place for new citizens when they arrive in our communities. Whether they come from Pakistan or Croatia or from Miami or Des Moines, new arrivals are on their own.

In Portland, Catholic Charities of Maine does the best it can by operating a center focused primarily on refugees. In the wake of the post Sept. 11th immigration restrictions, however, even it may be forced to close for lack of governmental funding. To my knowledge, no other Maine community offers a single place to go for new arrivals.

I was very proud to read in today’s Lewiston paper that the Franco-American Heritage Center and St. Mary’s Hospital is throwing open its doors this week to Lewiston’s newest

arrivals – the Somali population – for monthly meetings with long time residents. The Board of the Franco-Heritage Center understands just how lonely and difficult it can be to arrive in Maine without the financial and language skills necessary to immediately adapt to a new home.

I therefore call on our foundations to support the Catholic Charities and Franco-Heritage Center initiatives and to support the establishment of “Welcome Centers” – the kind that exist all across America - to alleviate the fears of those first weeks and months of anyone’s arrival to our State.

Right now, it wouldn’t be hard for a new arrivals in Maine to think that they are not welcome and that they “should go back where they came from....”

#2. Our governmental structure currently places the initial burdens of settlement on the cities where newcomers arrive. Our laws make those towns responsible.

I believe that the cities of Portland and Lewiston are doing a great job with the resources that that they have, and that other towns are doing nothing. Too many cling to their zoning laws and their budget print outs. They say there are no jobs and no room in the schools and no housing.

And not-too-deep, they really hope that no one comes there way.

This makes no sense.

Once we see migration and immigration as a benefit to all of us, it is state government must take action.

That is why the next Governor and Legislature must make changes in the way we pay for education, housing, law enforcement and social services to spread the short term costs inherent with new arrivals.

Small formula shifts in existing state programs spread across statewide expenditures will make major changes for those communities who see a rising population base.

Because we all will all share the long term gains, we should all pay the short term costs.

#3. My friends, our state needs to help those cities welcome the Bosnians, Somalians, Afgans, Latinos, Afro-Americans and any others who come this way. The economic traditions of most of these peoples are that of small business and agriculture.

That is a Maine tradition as well and we should nurture it.

And I know that we can do it because in some things where Maine does things better than anywhere else....

In preparing for these remarks, I returned to the Maine Office of Attorney General to check on the progress of initiatives that office has taken in the area of law enforcement and education.

I found that my old office has trained and certified over 300 Maine police officers as Civil Rights Officers.

I found that the core curriculum now contains a block of time on diversity training and hate crimes.

I found that they have build a data base that tracks hate crimes and where they occur and why.

I found that 188 Maine schools have civil rights teams – consisting of students, led by faculty and trained by statewide officials who contract with the Maine Office of Attorney General.

And we are the only state that does these things on such a comprehensive basis.

And I am proud to report that this statewide program is run by state funds – not municipal or school district – because the attorneys general who followed me understood that this is a statewide – not a “Portland” or “Lewiston” issue, and that the quality of all our lives is impacted by the civil rights standards of every Maine town and city.

And in preparing these remarks I talked to the Immigrant Legal Advocacy Program in Portland where a couple full time lawyers and many volunteers work tirelessly to represent our immigrant and refugee populations – funded by farseeing Maine foundations that understand that until and unless all citizens have their rights protected, none of us will have our rights protected.

So we can do it.

#4. Many of our immigrants and refugees held professional positions in their native countries. Our professional boards and agencies must learn to work with those professionals who come here who might have been educated in different

ways. These boards and agencies should be flexible and understand that there are many ways to practice what they do.

It isn't as if we don't need more professionals! In the area of education, 50% of Maine teachers are over 45 and 10% are over 55. As the ETEP program at USM has shown, immigrants who taught in their home countries can quickly qualify to do so here. The entire University system could take the lead in that effort.

#5. No one can understand the value of the American banking and legal system until we travel to another country. New arrivals are therefore often fearful of fully participating in our economy because they do not know where to go for legal and financial assistance. It is therefore important for the leaders of the Maine banking and legal community to compile a list of institutions and lawyers who have the technical expertise and the language skills to welcome new arrivals as full customers and clients so that they will be able to participate in the American experience.

#6. And our new Governor must lead on this issue.

It is being done in other places and we must do it here.

4 years ago Iowa – faced with many of the same demographics that we face – elected a new Governor – Tom Vilsack – who went out and put together a strategy.

He talked about the problem.

Leading citizens lent a hand....they set goals...began to put together strategies...

The strategy was attacked by conservatives – “English Language” initiative – and so-called liberals – unions who engaged in thinly veiled attacks on recent arrivals.

But the issue is before the people of their state. They talk about it. They debate it. They reach out. And numbers are slowly changing.

Indeed, when you now go the Official Website of the State of Iowa, the State of Iowa now proudly identify their most visited link as “Moving to Iowa!”

(Just for the fun of it, I went to our Official Website. Its most promising link? “Register your vehicle!” It then talks about Tourism.)

Maine has to take a lead and begin the same process. We have to really reach out to our kids – those who are here and those who have left – and we have to address diversity.

No matter what we do, there will be no miracles. But hard work is a hallmark of our state. We are a great and tolerant state.

I have no doubt that we can move in the right direction if we but try.

Addendum:

(Big business certainly knows that. They have formed the Business-Higher Education Forum. Corporate officials fully understand that the U.S. must focus on diversity or face a decline in competitiveness.

The goal of the Forum – led by 25 major corporations and the Presidents of 36 Universities – is to circumvent court imposed restrictions on affirmative action. Corporate America wants campuses to look like America so that their management structures will also look like America.)

New England's entire work force will grow slower than other parts of the country.

Our labor participation rates – e.g. women entering the work force – have hidden that slower rate in the work force. Now that women and men work in equal numbers, that increase will stop.

There has been a lot of talk about Maine educational levels.

The Maine Economic Growth Council issued a report in February, 2002

It notes that 90% of Mainers have H.S. degrees – higher than most places – and applications are all U of M campuses are dramatically up. The voc. Tech. Schools are full.

But just 5.4% of Maine citizens have an assoc. degree – down from 6.9 ten years ago. 24.% of Maine citizens have a Bachelors degree. 5.3% have graduate degrees.

