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The University of Maine: Message of Percival P. Baxter, Governor of Maine to the Eighty-First Legislature, March 27, 1923

Percival P. Baxter

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The University of Maine

MESSAGE

of

PERCIVAL P. BAXTER

Governor of Maine

to

The Eighty-first Legislature

March 27, 1923



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THE UNIVERSITY OF MAINE

*To the Honorable Senators and Representatives of the
81st Legislature:*

The problem of the University of Maine is one of the most interesting as well as one of the most difficult of those now before this Legislature. It needs to be discussed without prejudice, in a sane and reasonable manner. Animated solely by a desire to solve this problem in the interests of the whole State, and of the young men and women of the present and of the future who are attending and who will attend this institution, I have given my best thought to the study of the situation now existing at Orono.

The local self interest of any particular county or community should not be allowed to dominate this question, for the entire State is represented at the University and is interested in its future. According to the 1922-23 catalogue the classification of the 1234 Maine students is as follows: Androscoggin 28, Aroostook 96, Cumberland 154, Franklin 31, Hancock 64, Kennebec 79, Knox 30, Lincoln 20, Oxford 47, Penobscot 389, Piscataquis 55, Sagadahoc 22, Somerset 38, Waldo 31, Washington 82, York 68. With 240 students from outside the State the total enrollment is 1474. These figures show 14 more students than are accounted for in the report of the President of the Trustees of June 30, 1922, on which my subsequent statistics are based. This difference, however, is immaterial.

CO-OPERATION NEEDED

Honest differences of opinion as to the University's needs should be recognized and tolerated while personalities and bitterness of speech should not be indulged in. I had hoped that the new President and the members of the Board of Trustees, four of whom I myself have appointed, a fifth having been persuaded by me to remain upon the Board after he had tendered his resignation,

would co-operate with me in a serious and determined effort to eliminate those old-timed practices and antagonisms that for a generation have been the bane of the University. Personally I have done my best to work in harmony with those in charge of this institution, but their response has not always been cordial.

In this message I shall speak plainly but fairly, not hesitating to express my convictions and outline my plans regardless of the views of others. The crisis demands it.

DEMANDS UPON THE STATE

When the committee of Trustees and the new President came to the Capitol last autumn to consult with me about their proposed budget for 1924-1925, it soon became apparent that they came to dictate, not to discuss. Their attitude was unyielding and the President of the University made the definite statement that he would "not cut the Budget a fraction of a dollar." There was no suggestion of any willingness to listen to the views of others equally interested with them in the University's welfare. Moreover, the positive announcement was made at this meeting by the President of the Trustees that unless every one of their demands was complied with that most if not all of the Board of Trustees would resign. Such ultimatums are not conducive to mutual understanding.

I also deeply regret that the President of the University should have allowed himself to make a public utterance in Washington, on November 23, 1922, six weeks before the Legislature convened, and seven weeks before the Budget Committee of which the Governor is Chairman made its report, that the Governor of Maine was opposed to proper appropriations for the University and that it would be necessary to carry them over his veto. At the conference referred to I had listened patiently to the demands of the President and the Trustees for appropriations that totalled \$1,387,012.55, and my only comment was that I did not see how the State could afford such an outlay and hoped that the figures could be revised without crippling the proper activities of the institution. Since the Washington incident referred to, both the Presidents, of the University and of the Trus-

tees, frequently have indulged in similar unwarranted utterances, and although at all times I have been ready to confer with them they have not cared to discuss with me the University's affairs. It may be that I shall disapprove some of the appropriations asked for, but that does not mean that I shall disapprove "proper" ones, and certainly no one over four months ago had the right to make the statements referred to.

STATE'S EDUCATIONAL PROBLEM

The welfare of the young people at Orono is of such importance that regardless of these incidents, I approach the problem unbiased, and with a desire to determine what are the real needs of the University and to what extent the State is able to meet them. No one more than the present Governor has at heart the welfare of this institution, and I yield to no one in my desire to give our Maine boys and girls a good start in life. However, I not only am responsible for the welfare of the 1460 young people at Orono (President of Trustees report, June 30, 1922) but also am deeply concerned with the welfare of the 237,972 other boys and girls of school age who live within our State. It is right for us to be interested in the 6-10ths of one percent of our young people attending our State University, but the other ninety-nine and 4-10ths percent at least are entitled to equal consideration. You represent, and I am Governor of, all the people and our vision should be State-wide.

The University of Maine never has been held in check; it has outgrown itself; it has outgrown the ability of the State to properly provide for it. This is the root of its troubles. Year by year, deliberately and regardless of consequences, those in charge of the University in the past have expanded its activities. They seem to have been imbued with a desire to make the University the *biggest* educational institution in the State, while there is but slight evidence that they sought to make it the *best*. Their hopes for the University have rested upon false foundations, the consequence being that the students now within its walls are suffering from the errors of those who formerly were entrusted with its management.

These students, as well as the tax payers of the State, are paying the price of ambitions that were not based upon enduring principle. My ambition for the University of Maine is to have it aim to be the *best* institution in the State and that goal I constantly shall have before me. No other is worth striving for.

WHAT CAN MAINE AFFORD?

The fundamental problem before us is, how much can the State of Maine afford to expend in giving higher education to the 1460 young people at Orono, 1270 of whom live in Maine and 190 of whom come from beyond our borders. What portion of the total amount of money that the State raises for educational purposes shall be devoted to giving college courses to this comparatively small percentage of our young people? What is fair to those boys and girls who remain at home on the farm and who work in the factories, on whom a very considerable share of the State's burden of taxation is now resting? In urging appropriations for the University we should not overlook the fact that today taxes in Maine are onerous, that many of our farms are heavily mortgaged and that it is becoming increasingly difficult for the Maine farmer to meet his tax obligations. When thousands of farmers are obliged to lay by out of their hard-earned money the small sums of \$5 and \$10 at a time to build up a fund to pay their taxes, oftentimes being forced to borrow similar small amounts to pay the tax collector on the last day of grace, it means that some attention should be given to their relief.

The total amount of money raised by the State for schools in 1922 under the 3 1-3 mill tax was \$2,125,844.04. In that year the State Budget Committee recommended an appropriation for the State University of \$277,300.38, an amount equal to 13% of all the money raised under the mill tax to provide for the 4788 schools and 237,972 school children scattered all over this State. In 1923 the total amount of money to be raised from this mill tax will amount to \$2,242,559.14 while the University now is demanding of this Legislature an annual appropriation of \$693,506.27, this being one-half of the total for the two

years of \$1,387,012.55. Instead of 13% as recommended in 1921, the University now demands an annual amount equal to 30 9-10ths percent of the total funds that are to be available in 1923 for the 4788 schools and 237,972 children referred to. Furthermore it is stated that if the Governor raises his hand in warning and the money is not forthcoming, the appropriation will be carried over his veto, and failing in this, several, if not all, of the Board of Trustees will resign. These figures and this situation require no comment.

STATE AID COMPARISONS

For purpose of comparison I call your attention to the fact that for the fiscal year of 1923 the State appropriated for 38 private hospitals and other charitable institutions the sum of \$183,500.00, and for the 34 private academies the sum of \$54,250.00; a total of \$237,750.00. These 72 institutions combined received less than what was given to the University in 1922, the latter amount having been \$280,957.58.

The Budget Committee of 1921 recommended a total appropriation of \$558,257.00 for the University for the two fiscal years 1922 and 1923, while the Budget Committee of 1923 recommended \$701,678.00 or a 12½% increase for the fiscal years 1924 and 1925.

The State always has been liberal to this institution. In 1902 it gave it \$40,000; in 1912, \$115,000; in 1922, \$280,957.57; while in 1923, \$693,506.27 is demanded. This latter figure represents an increase in one year of 246%. The total amount the State has given to the University is \$3,233,014. These millions represent the State's investment in higher education and that investment must be conserved. I give these figures to offset the charges that the State has been parsimonious in its support of the University.

LIMIT NUMBER OF STUDENTS

It probably will be generally admitted that the State never can afford, and some will hold that it would not be desirable, to provide a college education for every boy and girl in the State. How many young people in Maine need a college education is problematical, but how many the

State can afford to educate is not problematical. Apart from these questions however I believe that taking conditions as they exist, the State without unduly burdening itself can maintain a well equipped high grade University of from 900 to 1000 students and that such an institution would be a credit to the State. Beyond this point the State at present should not go. This can be brought about in one of two ways; either this Legislature can establish 1000 students as a maximum for the University or the scholarship requirements can be raised to accomplish the desired results. Such action would meet with the general approval of thoughtful citizens. You and I face a very practical problem. Unless this, or some succeeding Legislature or the Board of Trustees have the foresight and courage to take the initiative, I predict that within five years the University of Maine will number at least 2,000 students. Conditions then would become even more unbearable than they are at present.

EXPANSION PROGRAM

The program laid out by the President and Trustees and submitted to this Legislature is one of expansion. The expenses of the University have increased rapidly. One item, that of salaries, shows an increase for 1923 over 1922 of \$32,610.00. The teaching forces are constantly increasing, 24 new teachers being called for in the University's latest Budget estimates. The payroll of last September shows the employment of 30 persons in the Administration Department, 53 in the College of Arts and Sciences, 21 in the College of Agriculture, 37 in that of Technology, 50 in the Experiment Station, 46 in the Extension Service and 186 others on the regular weekly payroll. These make a total of 424 persons receiving salaries at this institution. This gives some idea of the University's present obligations. If conditions are allowed to continue on their present course unchecked, the University of Maine soon will become a burden too heavy for the tax payers to bear.

It is apparent that those who in the past have had charge of the University have sought to imitate the great universities of the wealthy Middle Western states. This

accounts for its having lived beyond its means. As the president of the University frankly stated at the conference already referred to, the institution under his charge is approximately but 60% efficient. I maintain that such a state of affairs is deplorable and before I retire from the office of Governor I hope the University of Maine will be placed on a secure foundation, with the number of its students limited, all of them well housed and well taught, and with every branch of its activities working well within a comfortable margin of safety. To-day this institution is an overgrown school, improperly nourished, with both its teaching force and its student body working under difficulties. Its Trustees and friends feel under pressure to plan in every way to obtain increasingly large sums of money from the State Treasury, and in doing this they often have felt obliged to resort to political influences in order to keep the University's head above water.

BATES, BOWDOIN AND COLBY

Bates College, with its tuition of \$150.00, expends \$310.00 a year to educate each student. It has 9 administrative officers and 30 instructors and teachers, and an enrollment of 587 students. Bowdoin with the same tuition has 31 officers and instructors and 450 students and spends \$434.00 per student per year. Colby with a faculty of 31, tuition at \$120.00 and 505 students, spends \$300.00 per student per year. Every reasonable economy is practiced in all three of these colleges and there are none in the country that give young men and young women a fairer start in life than Bates, Bowdoin and Colby. The University of Maine with tuition of \$125.00 for Maine students and \$195.00 for those from other States, spends \$495.00 per student and has 142 in its faculty and administration. Based on a proportionate student population the University of Maine has ten students for every teacher while Bates has fifteen, Bowdoin fourteen and one-half and Colby sixteen. The cost of educating a student at Orono is 42% greater than the average cost of \$348.00 at the three colleges herein named. When these figures are considered in connection

with the statement made by the President of the University, that Bates is 75% efficient, Bowdoin 90% and Colby 70%, while his own institution is but 60% efficient, it shows that something must be wrong when the least efficient 60% institution costs 42% more per student per year.

STATE NORMAL SCHOOLS

The State of Maine conducts five normal schools in which are enrolled 1,020 students and appropriates \$180,000.00 per year for their operation and maintenance. This averages \$176.00 per student per year and represents the entire income, as no tuition is charged. All bills are paid out of this \$180,000.00 and the five institutions always are in comfortable circumstances. There would seem to be no good reason why the financial conditions of the University of Maine should not at least approximate those of our colleges and normal schools, all of which are well managed and are a credit to the State.

ENDOWMENT FUNDS—INTERNAL REORGANIZATION

In estimating the amount to be paid by the State as an annual appropriation, it is interesting to figure the State's contribution as though it were interest paid to the University on an endowment fund. This furnishes a basis of comparison with institutions like Bates, Bowdoin and Colby which receive no state aid and are dependent upon income from their endowments. An annual appropriation of \$250,000.00 would represent the interest at 5% on an endowment fund of \$5,000,000. The endowment funds of the three colleges referred to amounts to \$5,135,360.00 and the total income therefrom amounts to \$204,029.00. Consequently the University of Maine with \$250,000.00 per year from the State would receive more than the three other colleges combined, and what would equal the interest at 5% on an endowment fund of \$5,000,000.00. With the additional aid it receives from the Federal Government it should be able to educate 1460 students where the other three colleges combined without Federal Aid are educating 1542. These comparisons are interesting. As has been stated the University also re-

ceives large sums from the United States government, a source of income not available for our other institutions and which should be sufficient to provide the extra equipment needed for its technical courses. From these figures I believe it properly can be deduced that it is unwise to continue paying large sums into the University's treasury until there is a general reconstruction of its educational and financial program. The entire situation at Orono needs to be thoroughly revised by those who earnestly desire to have this institution placed upon a sure foundation.

IS UNIVERSITY JUSTIFIED?

The figures in the preceding paragraphs do not furnish a strong argument for lavish support of a State University. Such support would be justifiable if the University brought a college education within the reach of boys and girls who could not afford to go to other Maine colleges. In the case before us however it costs more to educate our young people at Orono than it costs at any one of the three private colleges in the State, and they receive less in return for the money spent upon them according to the University President's own figures.

POLITICS

It is unfortunate that the atmosphere at Orono should be permeated with politics. This produces an unwholesome effect upon the minds of the students, and gives them a false impression not only of their own importance but of public affairs in general. Not long ago the University paper was used as a medium for political advertisements and in its columns candidates seeking office pledged to the University liberal sums of the taxpayers money. It was apparent that the purpose of this advertising was to influence the students and through them the voters in their families at home to support those candidates who made the most alluring promises. This occurred notwithstanding the fact that on January 20, 1922, the Board of Trustees passed a vote the purpose of which was to confine to the Trustees the University's activities throughout the Legislative session. The Trustees sought to avoid

the unpleasant experiences of the Legislative session of 1921, when the Alumni Associations of the University became very active in carrying on an unfortunate propaganda. The vote of the Trustees referred to was as follows:

“On motion duly made and seconded it was voted that all matters pertaining to the presentation of appropriation bills to the next Legislature be handled exclusively by the Trustees of the University and that this action be conveyed to the Alumni Association and student body in the proper way.”

OUT-OF-STATE STUDENTS

As has been stated, the last annual report showed an enrollment of 1460 students not including 168 who were taking special courses. 190, or 13% of the regular students come from outside the State of Maine. The tuition of out-of-State students is fixed at \$195.00 per year and the cost of educating them is \$495.00. This means that the State pays \$57,000.00 a year for this item alone. It would seem inadvisable for the State to be burdened with this large expense when its own sons and daughters are not being properly cared for. There is an advantage, of course, in having a certain number of students from other States, but this situation needs attention for there is no logic in the State's continuing this practice. Out-of-State students at least should be self-supporting.

There are many details in connection with the business management of the institution which, if attended to, would effect large savings and here is a wide field for the exercise of good sound business judgment. In fact if the University is to be the institution we all want it to be, one in which we all can take pride, its affairs need a thorough internal reorganization.

PRESIDENT—FULL TIME

* I believe the management of an institution of 1460 students—1628 with the “specials”—is of sufficient moment to require the undivided attention of its Presi-

dent. It should not be necessary for him or for the President of the Trustees to travel about the State attending Legislative hearings and carrying on what may be called propaganda in order that the University may obtain what it actually needs. This, of course, is very different from informing the people as to what the University is doing and stimulating an interest in higher education, both of which are desirable and form a part of the duties of college authorities.

It would mean much to the entire State if the University's situation could be clarified for it is not helpful to have the Legislature biennially torn by dissensions between those who have the University's welfare at heart, but who honestly differ as to what should be done to properly maintain it.

ECONOMIES TO BE PRACTICED

As an example of expenditures that in my opinion are not justifiable, is the \$6,000.00 per year appropriated in order that the President may carry on certain experiments upon several thousand rats and mice. Apart from the fundamental difference of opinion as to the value or propriety of such work, and I protested against it from the beginning, I believe these experiments will not be approved generally, at least while the financial affairs of the University are in their present unsatisfactory condition. Also a considerable saving can be made in eliminating certain courses that are not well attended, and in consolidating the work of certain professors and instructors whose teaching hours per week are below what reasonably can be expected of them.

BUDGET ESTIMATES

It should not be overlooked that the institution actually has lived within the appropriation that the State made for it two years ago, for at the end of the year it had a current operating surplus of \$12,163.12. Notwithstanding the statement made by the President of the Board of Trustees in his annual report that the "utter inadequacy of the State's appropriation forced the University administration to drastic and stingy methods," I believe that

apart from the necessary repairs on the buildings, the University ought to be able to live very close to the figures given in the 1923 Budget report.

REPAIRS ON BUILDINGS

Extensive repairs on the University buildings are needed for they must be put into proper condition. It would seem to be in accord with sound business judgment immediately to repair these buildings, as they are alleged to be in deplorable condition, before planning the erection of new ones. The attitude of the University's President toward these repairs is shown by a remark made by him at our last conference. After urging an appropriation for expansion and for new buildings, he stated that "the repair of buildings is of least importance." With such a view I am not in accord.

"COLLEGE" SPIRIT

There is one phase of this State University problem that is difficult to explain. Those connected with a State educational institution, especially its alumni, seem to lack the cooperative spirit that accomplishes so much for privately owned institutions. An institution of the latter type when in debt naturally calls upon its loyal alumni to rally to its support, and seldom does its appeal fail. A college or a university debt of almost any proportions can be wiped out in a very few months, or an endowment easily can be secured if the right spirit prevails. In a State-owned University (for all practical purposes the one we are discussing is a State institution), it is impossible to arouse any favorable response when the suggestion is made that its Alumni join together and pay off the debt or raise an endowment. In fact the Committee of Trustees and the President who interviewed me refused to entertain any such suggestion, stating as a reason for their refusal that it is a State institution and everything, even the debt, must be paid from the public treasury. Such lack of "college" spirit is disheartening. If the Alumni of the University of Maine wished to do so, they soon could pay off the debt and in addition thereto could raise a substantial endowment. This institution recently

received a bequest of \$250,000.00 and no doubt others will be forthcoming, all of which will help to relieve the pressure under which it is laboring. I believe the University of Maine has a bright future if its Alumni, and those in charge of its affairs, including this Legislature, will take the necessary steps to put the institution on a right basis.

ADVERTISING

I have viewed with some misgivings the campaign of advertising recently launched by the University authorities in the daily papers. It seems to me that such a program lacks dignity and detracts from the prestige of the University. The best advertisement for this University is the young men and women it has sent and is sending out into the world. The ordinary forms of advertising are out of place here, and I cannot understand why the University needs a full-time publicity man. Its students, its Alumni and its record speak for it more eloquently than can any propaganda, no matter how skilfully conducted. The other colleges in the State do not feel such a need.

MAKE IT STATE INSTITUTION

Strictly speaking, the University is not a State institution, but if those connected with it and this Legislature will undertake the task of lifting it out of its present difficulties I should favor establishing it as a full-fledged State institution. In such an event I should be willing for the State to assume the outstanding debt amounting to \$217,500.00.

NEW TRUSTEES

If the University is to be taken over by the State, the Governor and Council should be directed to appoint a new Board of Trustees, and in order that the services of experienced members may be retained it would be wise to provide that four members of the present Board be re-appointed, the appointment of the four other Trustees to be entirely in the discretion of the appointing power. It would be well to have the State Commissioner of Education a member ex-officio and this would give the University nine Trustees. If this is to be made a new insti-

tution, owned and controlled by the State, it should start its career unhampered by any traditions of the past and Trustees should be appointed who really have at heart its future welfare.

AGRICULTURE IMPORTANT

The people of Maine are by no means unanimous in their support of the institution as it is at present conducted. I believe, however, they will support it once they become convinced that the University is to be carried on both in a liberal spirit and in a practical and economical manner. Established as an agricultural school, it unfortunately has allowed this branch of its work to become the least important of its activities with approximately 20% of its students taking Agricultural Courses. In the years gone by the farmers of the State always could be depended upon to rally to the support of the Maine State College, but gradually our farmers have become convinced that agriculture is of minor importance at Orono, and that the teaching of farming is of small moment there. Their interest in its welfare is on the wane, but if new life can be infused into its Agricultural Courses, I believe the farmers of the State will be greatly encouraged. Certain improvements in the farm buildings are needed, and although not called for in the Budget I believe some appropriation should be made for their rebuilding.

The School of Technology stands well among similar schools in the country and I believe we have reason to be satisfied with what it has done. It may be urged that there is no need of the College of Arts and Sciences, as we already have three such colleges in this State. If the whole plan of the University was to be revised it might be desirable to have its courses limited to those that deal with Agricultural and Technical sciences. However, this matter is settled and it is not advisable to make any change other than to proportionately reduce the number of students taking the Arts and Science Courses, so that the total of the three colleges may come within the limit that has been suggested. Special efforts need to be made to raise the Agricultural Courses up to the position of prominence and importance to which they are entitled.

NO EXPANSION

As to expansion, in my opinion, the people of the State will not look with favor upon the plans of some of the University's ambitious friends, to add to its already overburdened curriculum a School of Medicine and a Teachers' College. The closing of the Law School relieved the situation considerably and this is no time to think of new buildings, new courses, or new colleges. We should assimilate what we already have before taking on anything new.

I hope the errors of the past may not be repeated, that dissensions may be forgotten, realities faced and difficulties overcome. This all can be accomplished if the right spirit prevails.

We are representatives of all the people of the State of Maine. One of our duties is to prepare the young men and women and the boys and girls who are growing up in our midst to meet the problems of life. We have a great opportunity to take a step forward in settling this University problem, and although it is late in the session it is not too late for action.

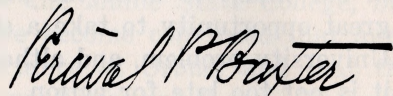
FOURTEEN POINTS

In conclusion I summarize the recommendations contained in this message. These are offered as one complete program, and I do not recommend the adoption of some of them and the elimination of others. I favor—

1. Approximately the Budget Committee's appropriation for maintenance with an extra allowance for reconstructing certain farm buildings.
2. Sufficient sums to repair the buildings, even though it be somewhat larger than the Budget calls for.
3. Making the University a State Institution.
4. Assuming the debt of \$217,500.00.
5. A new board of nine Trustees with the State Commissioner of Education a member ex-officio, four of the present Board to be reappointed, the remaining four to be appointed by the Governor, with consent of the Council.
6. A halt upon all expansion.
7. The number of students, regular and special, to be limited to 1000 either by law or by raising the educational standards of the University.

8. Emphasizing the importance of Agricultural Courses.
9. Reduction in the cost of education, so as to open the **University to those not financially able to attend other colleges.**
10. Making the University the **best** and not necessarily the **biggest** educational institution in Maine.
11. Elimination of politics from the atmosphere of the University.
12. Cultivation of "college spirit" among its Alumni and undergraduates.
13. Placing the University on a sound financial and educational basis, with a thorough internal reorganization.
14. Making it a Maine institution for Maine boys and girls.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Charles P. Baxter". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name of the Governor of Maine.

Governor of Maine.