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U.S. Senate

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U.S. House of Representatives

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Maine's Congressional Delegation Reflections on Our Shared Ocean

by Sen. Susan M. Collins, Sen. Angus King, Rep. Chellie Pingree,
and Rep. Jared Golden

M*aine Policy Review* submitted a series of questions to Maine's Congressional Delegation to get their take on issues confronting "Our Shared Ocean" and the public policies they are engaged in to ensure Maine's coast and ocean and their associated livelihoods remain protected for future generations.

When you think of the Maine coast, what comes to mind?

Senator Susan Collins (Collins): From Kittery Point to West Quoddy Head, the Maine coast is a place of spectacular beauty. In addition to the incomparable scenery, I am always inspired by the hardworking men and women who earn their livings from the sea, supporting their families, sustaining their communities, and protecting our precious ocean environment.

Senator Angus King (King): When I think of the Maine coast, I think of the people who rely on our oceans and coasts for their livelihood—many of them are carrying on a tradition that has been in their family for generations. The Maine coast is one of our state's most recognizable features; tourists flock from around the world to eat a famous Maine lobster roll next to one of our iconic lighthouses. The people of Maine help make this picturesque scene a reality. One of the best parts of my job as a United States Senator is getting to visit so many places across our state and meeting the people who make Maine such a special place to call home.

Representative Chellie Pingree (Pingree): As with many Mainers, the ocean is an essential part of my life. I have lived on the island of North Haven for over 40 years; I travel on a 12-mile ferry ride across Penobscot Bay to get home; and that bay is home to the largest lobster fishery in the world. Maine's oceans and the communities on our coastline are never far from my mind, whether I am engaged with the island community that I call home or in Washington, DC, fighting to protect them for future generations.

Representative Jared Golden (Golden): When thinking about Maine's coast I think about all the hardworking people that make their living from the ocean. Since entering politics, I've had the privilege of sitting down with Maine's fishermen to hear, and in some cases even see, how they do their work and what they need to do it. To put food on the table for their families and for families across the country, Maine fishermen rely on a healthy marine ecosystem for their livelihood. Because of this, they are some of the most responsible stewards of Maine's coastal ecosystems.

What public policies—federal or state—have had an impact on the Maine coast, ocean, and coastal communities?

King: There are so many programs that have benefited the Maine coast and coastal communities over the years. Programs like the National Sea Grant Program, Coastal Zone Management grants, and the National Ocean and

Coastal Security Fund help bring federal funding to Maine to help ensure that we are addressing the pressing needs of our coastal communities. The National Sea Grant program has created a network of university-based programs and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which relies on the expertise of thousands of experts to help us better understand, conserve, and utilize our coastal resources. The University of Maine is part of this network, and it focuses on Maine coastal communities while helping to develop the marine workforce of tomorrow.

In November of 2022, a federal court issued a ruling under the Endangered Species and Marine Mammal Protection Acts that would have effectively shut down the entire Maine lobster fishery within two years. The decision contained requirements that simply couldn't be met in that time frame and meant thousands of small, independent businesses, individuals and families in towns up and down Maine's coast would see their livelihoods cut off. I believe strongly in conservation and take the Endangered Species Act very seriously. However, zero right whales have been entangled in lobster gear in twenty years, and zero right whales have died due to entanglements in the Gulf of Maine. Maine's lobster industry has continually adapted to protect the environment through self-imposed environmental guidelines for over 150 years. I considered this ruling the most serious threat to our families and the coastal economy I have seen in my years of public service. Through the concerted actions of our entire Congressional Delegation—working closely with the governor and the Maine Department of Marine Resources—we were able to forestall the

drastic consequences of the court's order by enacting a six-year pause in the implementation of the new rules.

Pingree: As Chair of the House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee in the 117th Congress, I was incredibly proud to usher in unprecedented funding for climate mitigation and renewable energy, securing nearly \$43 million for the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management's Renewable Energy Program. Now, as Ranking Member of this Subcommittee, I am fighting to safeguard the progress we created in the last Congress while working to boost federal funding for ocean exploration and research. Additionally, the historic Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and Inflation Reduction Act—championed by House Democrats and signed into law by President Biden—funded the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration with \$6.9 billion for activities including marine debris removal and prevention, improving coastal resilience, and improving weather and climate data and services. With grant funding from the US Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration, the Seafood Economic Accelerator for Maine (SEAMaine) has brought industry leaders and committed partners together to develop an action plan to support workforce development, economic growth, and resiliency.

At the state level, Maine's climate action plan, *Maine Won't Wait*, has made incredible progress in the two years since Governor Mills unveiled the plan, which includes the Community Resilience Partnership. This partnership offers grants and technical assistance to municipal and tribal governments for projects to make communities more resilient to climate change and incorporate clean energy into operations. A growing number of coastal

communities are participating, including Camden, Westport Island, and Portland. Looking to the future, the Biden Administration released the first Ocean Climate Action Plan earlier this year to work towards achieving President Biden's climate goals. I share these ambitious yet achievable goals, which include producing 30 gigawatts of energy from offshore wind by 2030, conserving at least 30 percent of US lands and waters by 2030, and reaching zero emissions from international shipping no later than 2050.

Golden: Maine's lobster industry has faced significant regulatory threats in recent years, and many of these policies have the potential to enormously impact Maine's coastal communities. The debate over measures to protect right whales is a primary example of this. Maine's fishermen have taken great steps to ensure the sustainability of their lobstering practices, and since 1900, not a single right whale has been killed by lobstering gear or activities in Maine. However, this has not stopped a torrent of proposed regulations that would devastate fishermen in Maine and shred the economic fabric of so many Maine communities—all based on the unproven, theoretical possibility that a right whale could be killed. Protecting marine life is extremely important, but federal agencies need to actually understand how things work in Maine before they decide to regulate one of our oldest and most iconic ways of life into extinction.

Collins: Our lobster fishery is one of the best managed, most sustainable fisheries in the world. Our lobstermen and women have always exhibited great concern not only for the health of the lobster population, but also for the health of our oceans and all of its marine life. They have been innovators in conservation measures, and

I am proud to stand with them. That is why I worked so hard with my Maine congressional colleagues and state officials to secure the six-year postponement of draconian federal regulations that would do nothing to protect right whales but would jeopardize the very existence of our lobster fishery.

To cement that policy success over the long term, I have championed substantial funding for right whale-related research, monitoring, and conservation efforts. Even though there is no evidence that Maine lobster gear has ever caused the death of a right whale, our lobster industry has made significant changes to protect whales. They deserve to know that any future regulations will be backed by sound science.

What federal policies are you working on now or you would like to see in the future to protect Maine's coast and livelihoods?

Pingree: In this Congress, I am working to pass bills to mitigate ocean acidification, support our blue economy, and preserve our working waterfronts. My bipartisan Coastal Communities Ocean Acidification Act would direct federal officials to work with state and local experts to study ocean acidity and deliver a public report on the socioeconomic impact of ocean acidification on coastal communities. My bipartisan Ocean Regional Opportunity and Innovation Act would designate regional Ocean Innovation Clusters and provide grants for their establishment, operation, and administration. I also plan to reintroduce my bipartisan *Keep America's Waterfronts Working Act*, which would create both a Working Waterfronts Grant Program and a Working Waterfronts Preservation Loan Fund through the Department of Commerce.

Golden: Right now, I am working on extending the six-year regulatory freeze on right whale regulations for our fishing industries that the rest of the Maine delegation and I secured last December. I would also like to see any potential offshore wind power development take into account the lobstering and fishing grounds that Mainers rely on to make a living. In a recent draft plan for wind power generation in the Gulf of Maine, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) doesn't take Lobster Management Area 1, the most lucrative fishing ground in the Gulf of Maine, off the table. I'm working with the rest of Maine's delegation and the governor's office to demand BOEM exclude that area from consideration for offshore wind development. We must ensure that any energy future does not sacrifice our coastal industries and the communities that rely on them.

Collins: Maine's working waterfronts are integral to our state's heritage, economy, and culture. All along our coast, however, harbors that once were filled with the hustle and bustle of the fishing industry are being lost to other forms of development, shutting off the industry from vital access. Throughout my service in the Senate, I have worked with a bipartisan coalition of colleagues from maritime states on legislation to combat the loss of commercial access to our waterfronts. As Vice Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, I advanced nearly \$14.5 million in the 2024 Transportation funding bill for projects throughout Maine to assist towns and cities in renovating and upgrading their piers and docks for commercial fishing, and to support coastal resiliency improvements to protect against flooding caused by climate change.

King: In recent years, we have seen increased storms along our coasts that have left devastation in their wake. Climate change suggests these events will only increase in both frequency and intensity, raising serious concerns about whether we are adequately prepared to handle these natural disasters. That is why I have supported efforts to integrate natural or green infrastructure into repairs or upgrades to help boost the resiliency of our coastal communities.

The Gulf of Maine's offshore wind resource is among the best in the nation, while research at the University of Maine and Maine's strong maritime working tradition promise that the future of energy in our state will be Maine-designed and Maine-built. I'm proud of the state of Maine's work with the Offshore Wind Roadmap and Initiative, bringing in a broad array of stakeholders and culminating in Maine's recent offshore wind procurement legislation. I'm also working hard with my colleagues to pass the Reinvesting in America's Shoreline Economies and Ecosystems (RISEE) Act, which would make revenues from wind projects in federal waters—as Maine's are expected to be—available to adjacent states and conservation programs. In addition to seeing economic opportunity through the construction of the offshore wind industry, Maine deserves a fair cut of the royalty revenues to put towards state budget priorities and conservation efforts. As we work to build this new industry I remain steadfast in ensuring it does not impact our traditional ocean business. I, and the rest of the Congressional Delegation, recently wrote a letter to Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, calling for the federal government to follow Maine's lead and

prioritize wind development outside of Lobster Management Area 1.

What do you think are the biggest challenges facing Maine's coast and ocean?

Golden: One of the biggest challenges facing the Maine coast today is the ability of the coastal communities to continue to make a living from the ocean, specifically the Gulf of Maine. Generations of Mainers have sustained their communities through fishing, clamming, aquaculture, and lobstering in the Gulf of Maine. This body of water is warming faster than any other body of water on the planet due to climate change. Climate change must be addressed, but any policy changes must be crafted with the coastal towns and fisheries that are so important to our state's identity and economy in mind.

Collins: From rising seas to more powerful storms, climate change is an undeniable threat to our coastal communities. The bipartisan Coastal Fellowships Act I introduced will boost critical workforce capacity to help provide waterfront communities with the technical expertise to address this challenge. The National Climate Adaptation and Resilience Strategy Act I co-sponsored would require the federal government to produce a unified plan to increase the resilience of frontline communities. As Congress continues to increase funding for climate adaptation, improved federal coordination is necessary to ensure that investments maximize the resilience benefits for vulnerable coastal communities and their waterfront infrastructure. I have cosponsored bipartisan legislation to combat the acidification of our oceans by the carbon pollution that contributes to climate change. I continue to support efforts to reduce land-based pollution that degrades our coastal waters by advocating for

funding to upgrade wastewater treatment facilities, including \$17.9 million for Maine communities in the bipartisan infrastructure law I helped lead.

King: One of the most significant issues facing our oceans and, therefore, our coasts are the threats from climate change: both the ocean temperature and salinity are rising, leading to changes in species habitats. This will likely cause fish, lobster, and other native species of Maine to move to seek the conditions they need to survive. The fishing industry, just like so many other parts of our society, needs to adapt and pivot as oceans warm, fish populations change, and aquatic plant life becomes scarcer. I will continue to cosponsor legislation that contributes funding for research, technological developments, and financial support for the families that continue to get out on the water daily throughout these unpredictable times. While we look to new fishing practices and sustainable development, we must also control garbage and waste from ending up in our oceans. Each year, nearly 10 million tons of plastic is washed into the ocean, accumulating and cycling through food chains, putting countless species at risk, threatening fisheries, and negatively impacting tourism and recreation. Maine has an excellent track record of recycling, but we need to help stop the flow of plastics and other pollution into the oceans. Protecting our oceans and our coastline requires a multipronged approach requiring conservation, pollution reduction, and restoration.

Pingree: The climate crisis and our vanishing working waterfronts. Maine has already experienced 8 inches of sea level rise since 1950. Expectations for future sea level rise in Maine are 1.5 more feet by 2050 and 4 more feet by 2100. For

context, 1 foot of sea level rise alone increases nuisance flooding over 15 times. Sea level rise will affect Maine's entire coast and tidal rivers, causing erosion in coastal beaches, dunes, salt marshes, and bluffs; coastal groundwater contamination; and loss of 40 percent to 75 percent of dry beach area. Recent ocean heat waves have occurred in the Gulf of Maine, which is warming faster than 99 percent of the world's oceans and is beginning to lose its subarctic characteristics. Ocean warming, acidification, and sea level rise are already affecting ecosystems and coastal areas and will continue to accelerate as the climate warms. Commercial and noncommercial species like Maine lobster are shifting northward to follow their preferred environmental conditions, while species from the south and non-native, harmful species such as green crabs and invasive seaweed increase.

Maine people depend on marine resources, ecotourism, and maritime industries, so changes cascade well beyond the limits of the high tide mark. Nearly 30,000 Mainers are employed in the state's \$637 million commercial fishing industry. Regional climate fluctuations reduced county level fishing employment in New England by an average of 16 percent between 1996 and 2017. Tourism spending in the Maine Beaches region could drop by \$765 million annually with expected future sea level rise of 4 feet by 2100. Meanwhile, coastal communities nationwide face mounting economic pressure to convert their waterfronts to uses that are incompatible with these long-standing water-dependent industries, displacing fishermen and others who work on or by the water. It is critically important that we support efforts to preserve and protect working waterfronts that are already

occurring in coastal communities across the country.

How does the Maine coast and ocean fit into your overall work for Maine?

Collins: From our forests and farms to our waterfronts, there is no doubt that Maine's economy is inextricably linked to the environment. The men and women of our fishing industry have always been devoted stewards of the environment, safeguarding the ocean and its resources for the generations to come. I honor our state's conservation heritage by remaining committed to advancing reasonable and effective policies to protect our precious environment and the industries it sustains.

King: Working waterfronts are at the soul of Maine's economic heritage. For generations, Maine's blue economy has supported communities along our coast—and innovations in aquaculture, fishing, harvesting, and producing present opportunities to expand on this long tradition while creating more good-paying jobs for the 21st century. Maine is a global hub for innovative, sustainable blue economic practices, and I support efforts to keep our seafood industry competitive and booming. As a member of the Senate Oceans Caucus—and a resident of what I consider the most beautiful coastal state—I deeply value the long-term health of our oceans. Through generation-shaping legislation such as the Inflation Reduction Act, Congress has made significant investments in climate resiliency. Recently, NOAA received an additional \$3.3 billion to prepare, adapt, and build resilience to climate and weather events, improve capacity and research on weather, oceans and climate, and strengthen operations and facilities for the agency. We should be focused on

protecting the ocean and its marine resources for future generations.

Pingree: Addressing the climate crisis is my number one long-term priority in Congress. While our oceans are the world's largest carbon sinks, their health is threatened by rapidly warming waters. As an islander and representative of a coastal state, safeguarding our ocean, coasts, and communities from climate impacts is always at the forefront of my mind. It's also important to note that because of Maine's geographic location, our coast and waters present great potential for international, economic opportunity via Arctic trade routes. As a member of the House Arctic Caucus, I have been working to help Maine and the United States tap into this opportunity. I recently introduced the Iceland Commercial and Economic Leadership for Arctic and National Development (ICELAND) Act, legislation that would add Iceland to the list of nations eligible for investment and trade in the United States provided US nationals are treated similarly by the government of Iceland.

Golden: The coast and ocean are directly intertwined with Maine's economy, history, and identity. It's not hard to see why: our state has over 3,400 miles of coastline, which means almost everyone who calls Maine home has some personal connection with the sea. My work constantly revolves around protecting this way of life, and preserving our historic coastal industries so that future generations can continue carrying on those traditions. Whether it be supporting the workers at Bath Iron Works who are equipping our Navy with the ships needed to keep country safe, protecting lobstermen and women from onerous regulations, or advocating for the thousands of others who find work and recreation in the ocean, I want to make sure that the

coastal communities of Maine have a prosperous future.

What role if any does Maine's coastline play in national defense policies today?

King: The United States is an Arctic Nation and has significant economic and national security interests in the High North. We must be ready to capitalize on new opportunities while confronting areas of growing tension—including Russia's blatant disregard for global norms and China's increasing aggression—and that includes an authoritative diplomatic voice. As cochair of the Senate Arctic Caucus, I have been deeply involved in efforts to improve America's position in the region; for example, I introduced the Arctic Commitment Act, a comprehensive bill that would, among other things, require reports on eliminating Russia's monopoly on Arctic shipping and establish a permanent US maritime presence in Maine and Alaska locations. I have also helped secure provisions in the annual National Defense Authorization Act to increase activities and opportunities in the far north. Russia continues to outpace the United States in Arctic military capabilities—they have already invested billions of dollars in military infrastructure along its Arctic coast. We must actively participate in the region's governance and work with our willing Arctic neighbors to address the shared environmental, economic, and defense concerns. That's also why I introduced legislation to make the current Ambassador-At-Large for the Arctic Region position a permanent one. As nations from outside the region venture northward, there should be no doubt the United States is bringing the full weight of our nation to the expanding domain.

Pingree: Home to Bath Iron Works and Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, Maine's

coast has a long history in US national defense. These shipyards perform an incredible service to our country, building, maintaining, and upgrading the US Navy's fleet while being key pillars of Maine's economy. One of the country's four public shipyards, the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard ensures the nation's world-class submarine fleet is combat-ready, and Bath Iron Works designs and builds the most successful and technologically advanced destroyers for the Navy. That's why, as a senior member of the House Appropriations Committee, supporting these critical shipyards and the thousands of Maine jobs they offer will always be a top priority for me in Congress.

Golden: Between having one of the longest coastlines in the country, hosting a maritime border with Canada, and playing a vital role in producing and maintaining our military's seafaring vessels, Maine continues to play a key part in our national defense. Look at the workers at Bath Iron Works, for example. The men and women at that shipyard have taken their responsibility to bolster America's fleet so seriously that one of the most universally recognizable sayings in the shipbuilding industry is simply "Bath built is best built." Maine also hosts a large Coast Guard presence to defend our shores and protect those who are out on the open water. These brave men and women are the frontline against all maritime threats and are the first on the scene when something goes wrong at sea. They put their lives on the line to keep Mainers safe, and we all owe them an enormous debt of gratitude.

Collins: From the very first naval battle of the American Revolution—an American victory at Machias Bay—to the Liberty ships that carried the arsenal of democracy to the front lines of World War II, to

Bath Iron Works and the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard today, Maine has played a key role in defending our nation and our freedom. Much has changed over the years, but the threats to freedom remain. They are more numerous, and the oceans have not gotten any smaller. If we are to protect our freedom, and to extend the blessing of freedom to others, our defense will begin at sea. With the smallest US Navy fleet since the World War I, and with China advancing its naval force structure by leaps and bounds, we must reverse course. I am committed to ensuring that our Navy has the resources it needs to carry out its vital mission and to provide our skilled shipbuilders and engineers with the stability to stay on the job. It is for those reasons that I work hard to strengthen our Maine shipyards. In the 2023 Defense Appropriations bill, for example, I secured \$6.9 billion for three DDG-51 destroyers at Bath Iron Works and \$505 million for the modernization of Portsmouth Naval Shipyard. The brave men and women of the US Navy deserve the best, and the skilled men and women at Bath and Portsmouth provide just that.

Susan M. Collins was elected to the US Senate in 1996 and was reelected for her fifth term in 2020. Senator Collins is the Vice Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee and a member of the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee and the Senate Intelligence Committee.

Angus King was elected to the US Senate in 2013. King is a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, and the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Chellie Pingree was elected to Congress from Maine's 1st Congressional District in 2008. Pingree serves on the House Appropriations Committee and the House Agriculture Committee.

Jared Golden was elected to represent Maine's 2nd District in the US Congress in 2018. Golden serves on the House Small Business Committee and the House Armed Services Committee.