Introduction

It is a singular honor and pleasure to introduce today’s special guest. When your co-host, Ken Palmer, and I were asked to put together this series, we agreed that we could not talk about Politics Then and Now in Maine without inviting former Governor Kenneth Curtis to join us. At the same time, I think of no more eloquent and thoughtful words to introduce Gov. Curtis than those written forty years ago by the late U. S. Senator from Maine, Edmund S. Muskie of Rumford and Waterville.

In April 1974, in his introduction to a Curtis biography by federal Judge Kermit Lipez, Senator (and former Governor) Muskie wrote,

“When Ken Curtis leaves office in January 1975, it will bring to a close one of the most creative and energetic eras in all of Maine history. The eight years he has served as Governor span a period in which the state government has greatly expanded the breadth of human and social services, become a leading partner in a productive relationship with federal and local governments, and responded vigorously to the pressures of growth and development in our rural state....

“This has been a time of questioning for Maine people, a time of renewed respect for the intangible benefits of Maine life and an overriding concern not only with economic development, but also with the unique quality of life that Maine offers. Ken Curtis has correctly sensed that Maine people want change. This sense, coupled with his inherent qualities of sincerity and candor, has made him both courageous and successful. His is a story of a governor willing to try new ways to accomplish the longstanding goals of personal security, opportunity, and human dignity for all Maine people.”

It is fair to say that no person is more responsible than Ken Curtis for the government that we enjoy in Maine today, and that some would seek to dismantle. When he became Governor in 1966, Maine was dominated economically by a very small number of powerful manufacturing, utility, and financial interests; and politically, by an entitled Republican establishment long accustomed to getting its way in Augusta.

Maine also ranked at or near the bottom among the 50 states in virtually every important indicator of social, economic, and racial well-being: in economic diversity, in personal income, in educational attainment, in spending...
on public education, in social services, in transportation, and in regulation of environmental excess and abuse. All this and much more would change for the better during his term of office, in large part due to the force of his personal character and his ambition for all Maine people.

Welcome, if you will, the man who is generally considered among students of Maine history to be the most accomplished governor in all of Maine history; a Democrat who worked successfully for eight years with a Republican-controlled legislature throughout his entire term of office, former Governor Ken Curtis. (R.B.)

Ken Curtis. Thank you very much for your kind introduction, Professor Barringer. I want to compliment you and Professor Palmer for the timing of this series. With the government shutdown in Washington and the Congress’ threat to ruin the credit of the United States, there are many compelling issues before us. You have brought together some very distinguished speakers, with a great deal of experience in Washington and Augusta, who can shed a lot of light on what’s going on that a lot of us wish we knew better and could understand.

LBJ

I greatly enjoyed the video of President Johnson. I got to know him quite well – almost accidentally, in fact. He used to reach out to an awful lot of people, and I found myself many times in his company. I think, most of all, that you can learn from President Johnson. Any candidate for governor of any state in this nation should study President Johnson, because he knew how to pass legislation perhaps better than anyone else, before or since.

A lot of people might not agree with the way President Johnson did it; but he knew how to do it. Perhaps it boiled down mostly and simply to counting votes. He knew how many votes he needed to pass every piece of legislation that he wanted in his program; and he knew where they all were. I expect that if he didn’t know where they were, then probably the legislation would never have been introduced. He was the master of it.

As we look back, here was a Texas politician who was successful in passing some of the most meaningful and important legislation of our or any time – the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act; President Kennedy’s work on Medicare was finalized during his administration. So, he was in that sense a great president – except for the Vietnam War, a big mistake that did him in; but he was one of the great presidents in the history of this country.

I was not always on good terms with President Johnson. In 1966, when I had won the Democratic nomination for governor, he was a great friend of my opponent, John Reed. As chairman of the National Governor’s Conference, Governor Reed had passed a resolution supporting the Vietnam War; so, he was a very good friend of President Johnson. When President Johnson came to Maine that year on a non-partisan visit, Governor Reed was invited to join him and I was not, as I was not then an elected official. It became very important to me politically not to be left out, so Senator Muskie called the President’s staff late at night on behalf of Elmer Violette, the Democratic candidate for the U.S. Senate, and me.

We were invited – though we weren’t made very welcome. I remember that everybody was going aboard the USS Northampton on the trip to Campobello Island, where President Johnson was to meet with Canadian Premier Lester Pearson. We somehow got on board, but when we did we were segregated from all of the President’s guests; and I remember having dinner with the staff down below in the ship – which was pretty fine, as they were all good people.

We finally got to Campobello and there were helicopters waiting to bring everybody ashore. Well, my name was on a helicopter boarding list, but there was a line drawn through it. Still, I was able to talk to somebody and get on board the launch that was taking the baggage ashore, and it all turned out well. Nobody ever knew the difference, but I saved face and it was quite an experience.

After my election, President Johnson became one of my best friends, I would say. In fact, my wife, Polly, and I have said that we got invited to the White House so many times for dinner that we had sometimes to say, “We don’t think we can go this time.” The dinners were all the same, they were as big as President Johnson, himself. There was a receiving line, and he came along by himself and with a cameraman; and if you said anything to him, his answer was always, “Now, just look at the camera.” Anyway, he did great things; and he’s someone people should really look to, to see how to get things done in Washington.1

Looking Backward

I was a little reluctant to come here today, as I was asked to talk about the 1960s and 70s. Well, you know, that was 40 and 50 years ago, and I don’t know how all your memories are, I’m not so good about my own; but I looked around at the crowd coming in and didn’t see anybody that was that old; so, I feel a little more relaxed.

Prof. Barringer asked me to talk a bit about Politics Then and Now; and my experience was in the 1950s and 1960s in Maine. I was thinking how fortunate Maine was in those days for politicians. Then, we only had to feed basically three television stations, and with all due respect to Channel 8, most of the people watched Bangor and Portland; and they only had half-hour news shows, so you didn’t have the problem of 24/7 news media that politicians have to deal with today.

The other thing was money. It didn’t cost very much

---

1 Note: Richard N. Goodwin worked for JFK and LBJ in the White House and argues that LBJ’s great society program did not fail but was abandoned. See his Remembering America: A Voice From the Sixties, Little Brown & Co., Boston, 1988, p. 424 ff.
to run for office in those days. In fact, my first gubernatorial campaign cost somewhere in the neighborhood of $100,000.²⁷ (Part of that probably shouldn’t be declared, because Senator Muskie loaned the campaign a member of his staff, who became its only full-time employee as coordinator of the campaign office.) That made running for office – and the candidate – a lot more accessible to the public than he or she is today. They could judge you, and you could talk to them and find out things. Today, there are so many other things.

Maine in 1950s and ‘60s was pretty much lacking in good job opportunities. We did have a bright spot in the paper industry, which was doing very well in those days and employed a lot of people; and we had very many low income jobs that we don’t have now, in the shoe shops scattered all across the state. Those were low-paying jobs, but they brought us something very good, from Quebec: a population of Franco-Americans who made up pretty close to 20 percent of the Maine population. I don’t want to be partisan today, but I can say they pretty much all voted Democratic.

Politically, we still had one-party control in Augusta, namely, Republican. We had the old Executive Council²⁸ – all seven members of one political party – and they had a lot to say about who was appointed to positions in the government, and even over the budget. In the mid ‘50s, things started to change. The last Democratic governor we had elected was Governor Louis Brann in 1932, until Edmund Muskie was elected in 1954. As the story goes, the Republicans were divided among themselves in 1954 and said, “Well, maybe we should let a Democrat win this time; he can stay in office for two years, he won’t be able to do anything, and then we can get rid of him.”

Well, Ed Muskie served two terms as governor, they never did get rid of him. He then went on to the U.S. Senate, so there was a good end to that story. In addition, we had elected some members of the Congress: Congressman and later federal Judge Frank Coffin, who was one of the most capable people in the State’s history; Bill Hathaway, who made history by defeating Senator Margaret Chase Smith for the U.S. Senate; and Clint Clauson, who succeeded Ed Muskie as governor and unfortunately died after just one year in office. Then we were back to another Republican governor, John Reed, from the Maine Senate presidency.

On Entering Politics

I have been asked why I entered politics. Well, I think anybody who lived in Maine in those years would have been discouraged, and would have asked himself, “Isn’t there something better out there for me?” I grew up in a small rural town and went to a one-room school house with one teacher for eight grades. It was just about as poor a school as you could find; still, they actually did a pretty good job academically, although there was nothing else.

The first job I ever had was at that school, when I was hired as the janitor at a dollar a month. There was no running water, and it was my job to get a bucket of water and pour it into the bubbler for the kids; and to build and tend the wood fire to heat the school building. That was when I started saying, “You know, there’s got to be more to this.” The kids that you talked to were reconciled to the fact they were just going to finish out their days in that town. They didn’t have any dreams, they didn’t have any hopes, and it just seemed a bad way for young people to go.

I determined that maybe one way was to pursue education, and I tried to improve that way, without money. I attended a public high school, Cony in Augusta, and had to look at the law a bit to do so. Our town had a two-year high school with three students, and you had to go there or they wouldn’t pay for it. I discovered, however, that they didn’t have a vocational education course; and if you studied vocational education in another school, the town had to pay for it; so, I went to Cony, one that offered it.

After two years, I changed to the college course and went on to Maine Maritime Academy, where you could get a free undergraduate education by trading for ten years in the U.S. Naval Reserve. In my day they had a military draft; and I’m not saying I was the smartest person in the world, but I figured that it would be a lot better to go into the military service as an officer than as a buck-private.

Then I attended law school here on the GI bill. I feel today for all the young people who have to run up such

²⁷Senator Muskie often noted that the entire State Democratic Committee budget for the 1954 election – including his first campaign for governor and the three congressional districts that Maine then enjoyed – came to less than $20,000.

²⁸The Executive Council was provided for in the Maine Constitution as a check on Executive authority, with responsibility to approve all executive appointments and budget expenditures when the Legislature was not in session. Elected by the full Legislature sitting in “joint session” of all House and Senate members, it consisted traditionally and exclusively of retired and defeated members from the majority party – at the time, Republican. The Council was abolished as an unnecessary encumbrance on the Executive by vote of the electorate at referendum in 1975. On news of the abolishment, then-former Governor Ken Curtis said, “I didn’t think I’d live long enough ever to see it happen.”
Meeting People’s Needs

Much might be said about our legislative accomplishments. We see a product of one of them right here, when the University of Maine System was created. It’s just wonderful to see, after all these years, what’s happened with higher education all across the state. The other was, of course, the income tax. Through all this legislation there ran a common theme: to meet neglected needs and, most of all, to make state government more responsive to the present and future needs of Maine people. It didn’t matter who was going to be governor, whether it was going to be a Democrat or a Republican, they would need to have the kind of organization and government that they could work with.

“I have been asked why I entered politics. Well, I think anybody who lived in Maine in those years would have been discouraged, and would have asked himself, “Isn’t there something better out there for me?”’”

One of the major pieces of legislation we were able to get through was the reorganization of state government. When I became Governor, we had 213 agencies and commissions that really didn’t report to anybody; and most of all, the commissioners were not appointed by the governor. When you got elected, you inherited all those that were already there, and that seemed to me a hard way to administer anything.

I remember one story I’ll never forget about the quality of Maine people. I had been very clear about the fact that I thought the governor should be able to appoint his own commissioners; and at the time we had probably the most honest, crustiest highway commissioner in the history of Maine, David Stevens of Hallowell. Dave came in to see me and said, “I hear you would like to be able to appoint your own commissioners. I just want to let you know that you can have my resignation any time you want it.” Then, on the way out, he paused and said, “And I’m not so sure I want to work for you, anyway; so, I want the right to leave anytime I want to.” That was the best of Maine, and those are the kind of people that we had to deal with.

How did we pass the legislation? There’s a lot to be said about that, with a Democratic governor and a Republican Legislature all the while. First of all, we had an outstanding staff of highly qualified people. One is sitting right here, Professor Allen Pease,29 who taught political science

---

29 Allen G. Pease was for many years Associate Professor of Government at the University of Maine in Portland, later to become USM. In 1964 he volunteered for the Curtis for Congress campaign and, in 1966, co-chaired the research team for the Curtis gubernatorial campaign. Pease became the principal Administrative Assistant for Gov. Curtis during his eight years as Governor and, later, Director of the Maine State Planning Office for Gov. James B. Longley, before returning to USM.
here for many years and was my Chief of Staff; and Justice Kermit Lipez, who is here in the room and is a now a senior judge of the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. I could never describe how much they helped in the legislation. Then we had a lot of help from individual legislators and supporters and advisors.

Like LBJ’s experience with the Congress, it really boiled down to counting votes. On the income tax, we knew we had all but one of the Democratic legislators; we could count on every one of those votes except one – and we never did capture him. In fact, he ran against me when I ran for re-election; so that’s how loyal he was!

Meanwhile, you didn’t have to look around very much to know that a third of the Republican legislators would never do anything to help you, would never vote for any legislation you proposed; but that left all the rest. And all the rest really cared about Maine, and the kind of things that we were espousing in those days. These were legitimate needs – needs of the State – and many Republicans recognized this. So, by spending a lot of time with them, letting them become involved in the whole process, many of them came around; and we could ultimately count on their votes.

One story that I always like to tell is of the late Senator Harrison Richardson of Portland, who was at first one of my biggest Republican opponents. In the end, Harry drafted the income tax bill that became law. He came up with a version that was in fact better than the one we had. You knew that when a Republican leader came forward with a draft bill, you had better take it, because he was going to vote for it, that’s for sure. That’s pretty much the way it went. The needs were there, it was timely, and I don’t know that it was anything more special than offering Maine people what they wanted and needed, on a bipartisan basis.

An interesting part of my life was running for re-election one year after both passing the income tax and introducing gun-control legislation. The income tax is not well understood, never understood anywhere. We don’t have one in Florida because they don’t understand it. The point is that the income tax is progressive, it meets revenue needs for the future, and it also is a fair tax; low income people don’t have to pay it, they just pay the sales tax. As many of you may remember, the Maine income tax went to referendum after it was enacted; and the voters voted by about 75 percent to keep the tax, because we worked to help them and they understood what it was.

Gun control legislation was a little different. Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King had been assassinated, and the National Governors Association had recommended that all the states come forward with some form of gun control legislation. Ours was pretty much what you might call “registration.” It was meant to keep guns out of the hands of convicted felons, drug addicts, and the mentally ill; but it was defeated quite easily in the Legislature.

About 1,200 angry people gathered from all over the state to testify against the proposed legislation, while public opinion polls showed that the general public favored gun control by two-to-one, about like it is today. That was almost 50 years ago, and there are so many similarities to today. Anyway, that was to have been the end of my so-called political career; but I had enough friends working for me that I did get re-elected by 810 votes. (Applause)

The following June, after I’d won by just 810 votes state-wide, the income tax was on the ballot, to be recalled; and it passed by 100,000 votes. Maine people really understood and embraced it. That night I received a call from Senator Muskie, who had been my strong supporter, and he asked, “How does it feel to be so much less popular than the income tax?” (Laughter, applause)

**Q & A**

**Question:** Your administration was particularly interested in addressing the aspirations of Maine youth, and in offering real opportunities for our young residents. What do you regard as the greatest public need that Maine politicians should be addressing today?

**Curtis:** I think it’s the need for adequate funding for the public schools, the University of Maine System, and the Maine Community College System – the kind of funding they need, because it’s really an investment. I always talk about my education being totally funded by the government. Well, I modestly say, I think I paid them back in the income tax over the years.

**Question:** Governor, your approach to policy making was always pragmatic, making principled compromises and deals to get things done that needed doing, working across the aisle to win the votes you needed. Where has this practical pragmatic approach gone today, and why do you think it has disappeared?

**CURTIS:** I blame the media to some extent, the 24/7 media. It makes me angry when I hear about the government shutdown described by people in the media as its being both parties’ fault and the President’s fault. It’s the Republicans’ fault, and the President had nothing to do with it.
It’s the Congress’ responsibility to pass a budget, and we don’t get as clear information as we should on the issue. I don’t know that we have today the personal contact that we used to have between the members of both political parties; they need to spend more time talking with one another. If they did more of this, they might find out that they have a lot of things in common.

**Question:** The same may be true in Augusta. When you were in office, the entire Legislature would arrive for sessions and stay at the old Augusta House, since demolished. There, they could get to know each other. Now, they’re dispersed all over the city and some commute home every night; and it makes for a very different personal setting for decision-making today than it was then. Did the Augusta House setting make a difference for you?

**Curtis:** That was something that got talked about a lot when they left the Augusta House; that the deal that was struck was often made there, because of the proximity and familiarity.

**Question:** Do you think that the Tea Party Republicans will become the most influential people in the party, both in Maine and in the nation?

**Curtis:** I’m no expert in this field, but I don’t believe they will. My prediction on this government shutdown is that a lot of Republican members of Congress are going to come forward and say, “We have to stop this and pass a simple budget bill, nothing more than what we’re supposed to do on the budget.” Once they decide that they can stand up to those they seem afraid of, it will slowly lead to the demise of the Tea Party. Of course, we’ll have quite a few Tea Party members as long as we have the redistricting that exists today. Until some of the districts are redone, we’ll always have a number of Tea Party members.

**Question:** What is the best book a young Mainer can read today?

**Curtis:** Kermit Lipez’ book. (Laughter)

**Question:** We have a question from an old friend of yours, a legislator from your era and one of the great civil rights leaders of Maine history. “Governor, may I get your autograph?” Signed, Gerald E. Talbot of Portland.

**Curtis:** As many as you want, Jerry; and they’re all free.

**Question:** This relates to the income tax and some of the discussion that took place in the past legislative session, concerning the proposal to reduce the exemptions in the sales tax. Do you have any thoughts on this? Has that been a major problem in your judgment in this state?

**Curtis:** Basically, I would not agree with reducing exemptions to the sales tax if this means removing the exemptions for the items working people need, like food. The more you do that, the more you hit the lower income people who have to buy these things. If you have to raise more revenues, you might better raise the income tax, because then you’re getting people who can afford the tax to pay it.

In Florida we have what amounts to a seven and a half percent sales tax, covering everything but food and medicine; the state’s limit is six percent, and municipalities can add up to another one and a half percent. In Florida you also have a more mixed population, with a lot of very wealthy people, a lot of retirees on fixed incomes and a great many low income people whom the sales tax hurts greatly.

“You know, who would you say is the leader of the Republican Party in the Congress today? It’s pretty hard to negotiate a deal with anyone unless they’re someone, a leader, who can produce.”

**Question:** In his very fine biography of you, Kermit Lipez describes you as a governor who appeared comfortable in himself, and always in command. Your appeals to Maine voters were bolstered with facts and punctuated with humor. He quotes you as having said, “I don’t know why I did what I did. I don’t know if a person ever really knows. It’s just that there are so many obvious things that need doing; and I felt, Let’s just get about the task of doing them.” You did many things in office, including creating the Maine personal and corporate income taxes. What are the obvious things that need doing today?

**Curtis:** Well, a lot of it still boils down to money. We need to continue to find ways to fund those things that are investments in our future. We’ve lost an awful lot of the traditional industries that supported so many working people. Maybe we should put together the best minds we can find, take a long-term look at the State of Maine, and ask, “Where should the growth take place? What are the best hopes for our State, given all the problems it has?” Then government could concentrate a bit through education and other means to advance these hopes. I get the feeling we don’t have a good handle on where our future is, on what our best hopes for growth are.

**Question:** President Obama has different talents from LBJ; but even if he had LBJ’s talents in dealing with
the current Republican leaders in Congress, is President Obama dealing with Republican Leader Everett Dirksen of Illinois or with Ho Chi Minh.

Curtis: Ho Chi Minh, I think. You know, who would you say is the leader of the Republican Party in Congress today? It’s pretty hard to negotiate and deal with anyone unless they’re someone, a leader, who can produce; and the Republican leaders in the days of LBJ were people he knew could produce and would produce – even if he might have to offer them some incentives.

Q: Do you think the absence and reduction of earmarks has affected the control leaders have in Congress over the members and the committees? They seem to have a lot less leverage with the members today.

Curtis: Well, if they don’t have leverage today, the only reason is they haven’t used their power to pass legislation and give themselves the kind of leverage they need.

Q: In his talk earlier, George Mitchell pointed to a number of things that he feels must change in order to restore government by consensus and principled compromise. The first was that congressional redistricting must be taken out of partisan political hands. Second, the Citizens United decision by the Supreme Court has thrown gas on the fire of money-chasing by Congress members and severed the bond of trust between government and the people. Third, the money flowing into negative TV ads has got to be contained. Do you have any suggestions to add to Senator Mitchell’s list?

“The only real solution belongs with the people and the people’s vote. The people can vote for change, and must advocate for change.... All this boils down to the people, people getting into office and taking action.... That’s the only real power we have.”

Curtis: No, I think he’s a hundred-percent right; but the only real solution belongs with the people and the people’s vote. The people can vote for change, and must advocate for change. This is a way you can correct so many of these things, through the legislative process. And, you know, I have great optimism for the future. I don’t know whether I will be around to see it, but I think we’re going to see a wholesale change in the voting patterns of this country, and we’re going to see some of it in this next election.

When you stop and think how the Hispanics of the nation are growing faster than the white population; when you think how fast the African American population is growing; and when you think how the old-style Republicans have managed to offend the women of this country and the young people – if you put all these groups together, they are going to have more voting power than our so-called white male leaders. There was a picture the other day on television of Republican leaders discussing some important issue – whether it was the budget, or whatever – and every single one of them was a white male. That has to change and it is going to change, no question.

There’s a rising star that’s come forward in Texas, State Senator Wendy Davis. She’s announced that she’s running for governor and she’s starting out with a pretty good lead. There’s going to be more and more women coming forward in this next election who are not going to tell us whether we should have children, or use contraceptives, or stay home and cook. They aren’t going to take this any more, I can tell you because my wife, Polly, tells me that!

Q: About your two gubernatorial elections, in 1966 and 1970: you got a majority in both, even though it was 810 in 1970. Since that time, almost all of our governors have been elected with a lot less than 50 percent, between 35 and 40 percent. Might you favor a runoff election in the event nobody gets a majority in the governor’s races?

Curtis: I don’t know. It would depend on how they might come out. I’m still partisan and would hate to do anything to mess up the chance of another Democrat.

Q: At a recent convention of the AFL-CIO, U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren of MA said that the working people of this country know the system is rigged against them today. Do you agree, and if so, what does this mean for our country?

Curtis: I’m not so sure that in some way the system hasn’t always been rigged against the working person. The average person still suffers tremendous controls from Wall Street and from industry, over what goes on. I would like to say about Elizabeth Warren that she’s such a breath of fresh air. She’s going to do more than anyone has ever been able to do, to straighten out the nation’s finances. She’s an outstanding individual and a good example of why we could use more women in politics.

Q: Is there any way to stem the influence of corporations and big business in our politics?

Curtis: Yes, through legislation; through what we’re just saying that we would like to see happen; but all this boils down to the people, people getting into office and taking action. That’s the only real power we have.
**Question:** What is the impact that “independent” candidates are having on the party system and elections here in Maine, and in the 2014 gubernatorial election?

**CURTIS:** Well, we’ve had some very good and strong independents, Angus King being one and Cong. Bernie Sanders of Vermont another; but I think they get into office through very special sets of circumstances. For this next coming election, a vote for an independent is probably a vote to keep the governor we have. I think Cong. Mike Michaud has an excellent chance and has gained a lot of support for winning this next election. If he loses, it will be because the voters think they’re going to be better served by an independent who probably doesn’t have a chance of winning.

**Question:** Governor, you are known perhaps more than any other Maine governor for aggressively recruiting highly talented people into state government. Where did that philosophy come from, and how did you go about doing that?

**CURTIS:** Well, it was kind of a two-fold effort. You need to attract the best minds you can, and we had a lot of young attorneys like Judge Lipez and others who came forward and wanted some government experience. They were extremely bright, and had not spent a lot of time becoming involved in the state, itself. They looked at problems in a fresh way; and when they got a chance to come and participate, they enjoyed it and attracted more.

We also had people like Professor Pease, who is just as competent in his own right; and what he brought to the team was the knowledge of Maine and Maine people. So, we could take some of the best ideas in the world by some of these bright young people and filter them down so they might fit Maine. It was a tremendous team. I’m just delighted that so many came here and got a lot out of being here; and every one I think of has become highly successful. Funny though, most haven’t run for public office; I guess that was one thing they learned, to stay away from that stuff.

We also had people like Professor Pease, who is just as competent in his own right; and what he brought to the team was the knowledge of Maine and Maine people. So, we could take some of the best ideas in the world by some of these bright young people and filter them down so they might fit Maine. It was a tremendous team. I’m just delighted that so many came here and got a lot out of being here; and every one I think of has become highly successful. Funny though, most haven’t run for public office; I guess that was one thing they learned, to stay away from that stuff.

**Question:** Governor, the market value of labor is not what it used to be. We talk about inequality in this country and the concentration of wealth that only a few enjoy. Now, labor competes with robots, it competes with people all over the world. The people who own the robots can operate with greater efficiency, and workers to a substantial extent are left out. Where is all this going?

**CURTIS:** I think you are absolutely right. This is one way the times are changing, because we are creating new opportunities for new minds to come forth with new ways of doing things; but we can’t forget that it is leaving people out who aren’t going to be part of that. Right now we’ve got the question in Washington of raising the minimum wage; we could do things like that to try and make some of the menial jobs a little more meaningful. We’ve got to make sure people in low income jobs at least get decent pay, pay that reflects their important place in creating wealth for owners and for society.

I think back to the little town I came from. Maybe we can get to a lot of the younger people and offer them more hope, by saying, “You know, you don’t have to settle for the menial jobs. You can prepare yourself. You can prepare yourself to be one of those who invent the robots, and those kinds of things.”

I would say in passing that many people have been so helpful to me along the way. Forty years ago, upon the death of my daughter Susan, a few friends created the Susan Curtis Foundation, a summer program for economically disadvantaged children. What we saw then and see now are a lot of the kids from homes and communities with no hope, who think they don’t have a chance. They don’t think they are as good as anyone else. The whole idea of the foundation was to say to them, “You can do anything that anyone else can do, you’re just as good as anyone else!”

Out of this, we get a surprising number of kids who are making it to college, going through college, and bettering themselves and their families’ lives. Kids who came from communities that I remember so well; who thought that college wasn’t for them, that they never would have a prayer of doing these things. I think there’s a lot we can do with and for young people, to encourage them to think bigger. There are things we can and should do legislatively, as well, to help prepare young people for better employment opportunities.

**Question:** Governor, when you were in office, the feminist movement was building and becoming very, very lively. My question is, Do you think that the more recent gay rights movement has had a negative impact on the feminist movement?

**CURTIS:** I don’t honestly know. The gay rights movement is here, it’s happening, and it’s going to grow. It’s something we had better accept, because it’s here and many believe it’s the right thing to do. It’s going to continue. If I had an opinion, I would say that a negative impact on the women’s movement is not what any of us would like or would wish for. (Applause.)

Thank you very much. Now, you can all go out and enjoy this fine Maine weather.