

Governor Janet T. Mills Second Inaugural Address  
Augusta Civic Center Wednesday, January 4, 2023

Thank you.

Mr. President, Madam Secretary of State, Madam Speaker, Madam Chief Justice, (I like the sound of this), members of the 131st Maine Legislature, members of the Cabinet, Rabbi Asch, Bishop Brown, distinguished guests —

It is a profound honor and a privilege to take the oath prescribed by the Constitution and to assume again the mantle of Governor of the great State of Maine. I am deeply humbled by the trust the people of Maine have placed in me.

President John F. Kennedy said, “If more politicians knew poetry, and more poets knew politics, I am convinced the world would be a little better place in which to live.” I agree.

And so I want to thank our own poet laureate Julia Bouwsma and Bethel resident and Presidential Inaugural poet Richard Blanco – and Maine’s poet-musician Dave Mallett – for their very inspiring words.

Thank you also to the Franklin County Fiddlers and the incredible Pihcintu Multinational Girls Choir, including my young friends Shy and Natasha who graced this same stage with their presence four years ago — Welcome back! You are more beautiful than ever!

I also draw your attention to the empty chair in the military section to honor and recognize all Maine service members who have lost their lives in service to our country.

I would not be standing here today if it were not for my family: my brothers Peter, Paul and David, my sister Dora, my five daughters and five grandchildren, and my husband Stan, gone eight years now, who arose every morning happily proclaiming, “the best is yet to come!”

Traversing this state many times over many months, I have learned more about the character of our people and the worth of our communities, what we give, what we take, what we offer to each other.

I toured clinics and hospitals, large and small, schools, warehouses, stores, diners and boathouses, log yards, libraries and factories, houses of worship of all faiths.

And I can report:

- From the Can Am at America’s First Mile to Maine’s first town, 375-year old Kittery,
- From Friar’s Brewpub in Bucksport to Bangs Mussels in Portland,
- From Robbins Lumber in Searsmont to Louisiana Pacific in Houlton,
- From Geiger Brothers in Lewiston to New Balance, Sappi, and Maine Grains in Somerset County,
- From the lakes and slopes of western Maine,

– To the University of New England, Athena Health, Jackson and Bigelow Labs, The Ferland Center in Orono and the Roux Institute in Portland –

Great things are happening all over Maine!

And I can report to you as well that, across this Maine – this one Maine – hope is very much alive. Over the last few years, there was something that caught our attention especially during the pandemic – these large luminous, neon-like signs, began popping up in cities across Maine. “Hopeful,” they read in colorful, cursive script. These signs became a symbol not only of survival but of health, renewal, new life.

The sign’s creator, Charlie Hewitt, said, “To be hopeful is not a gift – it’s a challenge. To be hopeful requires action...commitment...opening your eyes, it requires making a decision...being part of something.” Maine people know and embrace this. Indeed, we experienced it these last four years.

Tonight, like Charlie Hewitt’s art deco signs, a flashback to previous decades, the James Webb Telescope is taking us back through time and into the bowels of celestial history, like a magical mystery tour of the universe, drawing us both inward and outward through space and time, and unlocking mysteries of the past and foreshadowings of the future.

I can’t help but wonder: if our forebears a century ago had had a Webb Telescope to view the world down through time, what might they think of where we are today?

Would they have ever imagined that the log drives would come to an end? That the Narrow Gauge railway would turn into a quiet foot path? That our granite quarries would be rendered obsolete by the invention of concrete? Could they have foreseen cell phones and flat screen TVs and computers of any size with words that are written and then disappear on a virtual page as though they had never once become thought?

We do know one thing our forebearers were thinking about. Exactly one hundred years ago, Dora Bradbury Pinkham of Fort Kent, Maine, became the first woman to serve in this Legislature.

Arthur G. Staples of the Lewiston Evening Journal wrote at the time, “it may happen that, in after years, perhaps 2023, some woman Governor of Maine, and some legislature largely composed of women, may desire to know how the first woman legislator carried herself.”

“So!” he went on, “In the year 2023, one hundred years hence, Dora Pinkham is thus presented to you....Maine is ready for her sisters.” Well, Arthur Stapes, here we are!

I hope Dora Pinkham would be pleased to know that today half our congressional delegation are women; that a black woman from Portland is our Speaker of the House and that a woman whose own roots lie deep in Pinkham’s beloved County, has now taken the oath for the second time to serve as Governor of the state.

Today, a century after Dora Pinkham took the oath, our rivers no longer carry logs to sawmills. Our food comes in slick packages from around the globe. And we meet with distant friends and coworkers on a screen the size of a writing pad.

But what about our descendants, those generations yet to come – what might the telescope of the future reveal to them about who we are now and where we are going? Will it be good? Will they be proud of us?

Will the people of the future see how we fought disease, homelessness, crippling opioid use and a fear of those who are different from us? Will they appreciate that, for their sake and ours, we began to rid our farms and waters of the forever chemicals known as “PFAS”? Will they see how we promoted health and education; celebrated arts and literature; preserved our precious right to vote and conducted free and fair elections? How we adjusted to technology and innovation? How we adapted and evolved through tumultuous times, exploring new sources of energy, electricity, new modes of communication and travel?

I hope so.

But perhaps they will ask other probing questions as well, like:

“What was daylight savings time all about?”

“Who the heck was Elon Musk?!” And “what on earth was ‘Twitter?’”

And “What were all those tall gray structures that held something called ‘an office?’”

And maybe they will also ask:

“What took them so long to shelter the unhoused?”

“Why did it take years to build a house when we can 3-D print a single home in just an hour?”

“Why,” they may ask, “did they wrap everything in packaging, material they could have re-used, and why did they dump waste in the ocean and bury it in the earth?”

“What were all those parking lots and those tarred roads crisscrossing the countryside?” they will ask. “And the gasses emitted from structures and vehicles that clogged the air, warmed the planet, and melted the ancient glaciers?”

“Why did the scourge of a drug epidemic rob them of so many precious lives?”

“Why didn’t they have safe and loving places to care for all their children?”

“Why did they pay so much every time they went to a doctor or a pharmacist?”

These questions, my friends, may be asked in the future – but the answers will be shaped by our actions in the coming months and years.

Four years ago I stood before you and promised to work for a healthier, more vibrant, more welcoming state.

Who could have known, one thousand four hundred sixty three days ago, that this state, this nation, and countries across the globe, would face a deadly pandemic reminiscent of the Spanish Flu one hundred years before, one that would threaten the safety of every community, business, family and person, one that would challenge us to reinvent how we learn, work, play, travel and communicate safely, a phenomenon that would test the very core of our character?

It was during that time that I heard from thousands of you – emails, cards, letters, notes from people sharing their thoughts and their fears.... including ones from children, like 10-year old Savannah, who wrote, “Dear Governor Mills, I hope this COVID doesn’t affect our hearts being isolated from one another.”

Well, Savannah, we learned that neither a worldwide pandemic, nor any other thing will ever isolate our hearts from one another. For we are a caring people. We in Maine are family. And we have found such strength within ourselves we didn’t know we had, even, as Dave Mallett puts it, “with our backs against the wall.”

And we have come through that horrific time better than nearly every other state in the nation. With the good people of our Cabinet, with the brilliant leadership of Commissioner Jeanne Lambrew and CDC Director Nirav Shah and others, we answered the call.

Now, experts nationally say that both our public health response and our economic recovery have been among the best in the country.

Four years ago I committed my new administration to taking us into the future, to welcoming new people to our state and welcoming back those who have left.

So, I am pleased to report, after the decades’ long exodus of young people from our state, Maine now boasts the 7th highest in-migration rate in the country.

We are welcoming new people every day.

And we continue to listen to the people of Maine.

You said you wanted a government that paid teachers better, that funded public schools, schools where children learned on full stomachs, a government that made the dream of higher education attainable for more people.

And so we fully funded the state’s share of public education for the first time in history. We funded universal free meals in the public schools. We’ve provided free community college to recent high

school grads and we enacted one of the most generous student loan forgiveness programs in the country.

You said you wanted health insurance for more people, so we expanded MaineCare to more than 100,000 people, as the voters told us to do. We have reduced the uninsured rate by more than any state in the country. And we listened to small businesses drowning in health insurance costs and lowered their premiums for the first time in decades.

You asked us to pay attention to what the United Nations scientists have called a “Code Red for Humanity” and the violent storms across the nation damaging homes, towns, fisheries, wildlife, everything our nation holds dear. So, with renewable energy, weatherization, efficiency, alternative heating sources, and a focus on resiliency, we have put Maine on a path towards carbon neutrality, with a plan to protect our precious farms, shorelands and towns from the ravages of climate change.

You asked us to expand broadband, recognizing that it is the communications highway of the future and that high speed Internet is as necessary to everything we do as water is to life. So, we created the Maine Connectivity Authority. We’ve connected more than 48,000 households to the Internet, and I’ve pledged that by the end of 2024 every person in Maine who wants a good Internet connection will have one.

You asked us to begin to repair the divisions between the State and Tribal Nations. And so we enacted the highest water quality standards in the nation for rivers with sustenance fishing; we expanded tribal court prosecutions of domestic violence; and we negotiated major new revenue sources for the tribes.

You urged us to protect reproductive health care against the threat, now real, that the Supreme Court would overturn Roe v. Wade. And we did so, passing laws that discouraged protestors from blocking health clinics, that required public and private insurance coverage of abortion services and that made those services available to women in rural as well as urban areas of the state.

You asked us to preserve some of the very special places of our state. And so, without borrowing, we reinvigorated the Land for Maine’s Future program and acquired thousands of acres of working waterfront, farmland and wildlife habitat for generations to enjoy a hundred years hence.

You asked us to fight against federal rulings that threatened our iconic lobster industry. And we did just that — working with our Members of Congress, securing a regulatory pause as well as funding for new research to protect both the Right Whale and the lobster industry.

You asked us to manage our budgets prudently. So State government has lived within its means and built up the Rainy Day Fund to a record high to shelter us from the impacts of inflation and a possible recession. And we have continued to fix our highways and bridges – worn by time, use, and Maine’s changing seasons – without borrowing.

But our job is far from finished.

Today a workforce shortage undermines our very ability to get things done – from teaching, policing, healthcare, farming, to selling and manufacturing goods. “Help Wanted” signs are everywhere.

And so we are expanding workforce training in high schools and community colleges. We are making more child care available for working parents. And we are partnering with towns and businesses to find better housing for workers and shelter for the unhoused. And we are putting people to work.

You are asking us to strengthen and diversify our economy, recognizing that we are too dependent on other states and nations and too vulnerable to the volatile winds of worldwide geopolitics. So we are investing in our fisheries, farms and forest products to produce more at home, seizing on our spirit of independence and self-reliance, while seeking new markets abroad.

You are asking us to diversify our energy sources and loosen the stranglehold fossil fuel companies have on the wallets of Maine families and businesses. So we are pursuing renewable sources of energy that will protect both our environment and your family’s bottom-line, instead of big oil’s profits.

You are asking us to address the crisis in housing.

So we issued the senior affordable housing bonds first thing. Then we enacted the largest investment in housing in state history. We renewed the historic rehabilitation tax credit. And we have funded more than 1,500 new residential units and are adding hundreds more in the years ahead. We are working every day with cities and towns and developers to stand up emergency shelters and workforce housing in a way that fits the needs of every town.

You are asking us to do our best to stop the ravages of opioid addiction and the waste of human life and aspirations from drugs like fentanyl and methamphetamine. And so we are, in earnest, providing treatment beds and recovery and prevention measures, and distributing Naloxone everywhere to save thousands of lives. And we will make sure that every school and community has an effective prevention program to stop the scourge of addiction before it begins.

You are asking us to make sure that every child is safe, acknowledging that these drugs that are killing adults are endangering children too. We reactivated the Children’s Cabinet, long dormant. We put more child protection workers on the street. And we’re adding resources for foster families in order to keep our children safe.

But that work is never over.

We cannot and shall not rest until we eradicate the scourge of child abuse and neglect, drug overdose and domestic violence – acts, injuries and deaths that tear at the very fabric of a society. You are asking us to recognize that children’s emotional health too suffered during the pandemic and that hospital emergency rooms and jails are not the right places to treat someone in a mental health crisis.

So we have opened Maine's first comprehensive crisis receiving center. We are investing in residential care and community-based treatment. We are training more professionals and expanding mental health crisis services statewide.

Ladies and gentlemen, over the next four years it will be our challenge to address these issues head-on, to continue the march of progress we began four years ago, and to be prepared for challenges not yet known to us.

In doing so, we envision Maine as a place where quality healthcare is unquestioned; where good education, from pre-K through graduate school, is available and affordable; where good-paying jobs are offered in every corner of the state; where children are safe and secure in their homes; and where anyone can go online from any place in Maine to shop, attend a class, conduct business, get medical help or simply send a message to a friend.

These are our goals – hopeful but real.

That hope is built of the hardiness of a people who endure long winters and muddy springs, hot summers and windy falls. People who endure and survive and thrive above it all.

Hope is not an easy thing. It's not mere wishful thinking. It's not just trying to do what we did yesterday in the same old, same old ways. Hope is disruptive. It is a four-letter word, after all. It challenges and changes the way we do things. It calls on us to advance and adapt, while preserving who we are as a people and all the values we hold dear.

More than ever before, because of everything we have been through and because of everything we are, hope resides right here in Maine.

Hope is manifest in the actions you took this very day, actions inspired perhaps by one of humanity's great spiritual guides who said 2,000 years ago, saying:

“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you took me in, naked and you clothed me....”.

For your actions today in housing, heating and helping those in need, the people of Maine are deeply grateful. You, the Maine Legislature, have provided hope.

Hope is about finding new and innovative ways to solve our problems, using the ingenuity and courage we rediscovered within ourselves these last few years.

And I see hope all across this state today:

— There is hope in the work of University of Maine students devising new uses for wood, and ways to harness the power of the raw winds of the Atlantic, and methods to build homes with bio-based materials from a giant printer;

— There is hope in the aspirations of innovators at the Roux Institute, using artificial intelligence and data analytics to solve complex problems;

— Hope in cities like Waterville, Biddeford and Westbrook, evolving from their industrial past, reinventing their downtowns and attracting new families and businesses every day;

— Hope in the faces of the women shopkeepers in Lewiston and Portland who are selling fabrics, foods and spices from other countries, these industrious mothers of soccer champions, daughters of another continent;

— Hope in the vision of enterprising artists, poets, musicians, architects, writers and makers of crafts in every corner of this state;

— Hope in the far reaches of the County, Downeast, and in the shadows of our western mountains where farmers, foresters, fishermen, hunters, storekeepers, and tourists co-exist;

— There is hope too in the eyes of those who have forded raging rivers, thick forests, steep mountains and rough seas to seek refuge and work in our country and in our state.

There is hope for the future, just as it was hope that saw us through troubled times in the past.

The charge, the responsibility we take up today is to choose action over acquiescence and apathy, to make decisions grounded in experience with an eye to the future, and always to be a part of something larger than ourselves.

So, on this solemn occasion, let us recommit to working together and acknowledging:

- that healthcare is a human right and we will fight to preserve it;
- that education is essential and we will provide it;
- that climate change is real and we will combat it;
- that a decent home is essential and we will build it.

And when the people of the future look back on us through their own James Webb Telescope – they will see that we worked together, during difficult times and good, that we settled our differences with civility, commonsense and compassion, that we took care of one another, that we protected the air, water and land around us, and we built a state that survived and thrived long into the future.

And perhaps they too will see those things I believe will never change:

– the way the surf of the mighty Atlantic pounds the granite shores of our state;

– the way Katahdin rises up in all its majesty in the western sky;

– the way the Basilica in Lewiston inspires the people of the mighty Androscoggin;



– the way so many institutions of higher learning enrich and grace our towns and cities across the state;

– the way Moxie tickles the throat as it goes down and the way the wild blueberry finds a place in every tasty meal.

One hundred years from now, people not yet born will turn a telescope back in time and find in the Maine of the 2020s a place where government did everything it could to save the lives and livelihoods of its people; took nothing for granted but invested wisely to make Maine a clean, healthy and welcoming place where success is attainable.

And they will remember one sign, one word, that guided our path, our actions and our dreams: “Hopeful.”

It is the highest privilege of my life to serve as your Governor, during hard times and good, stormy seas and calmer waters, as we weather the best and the worst of times together, tackling extraordinary problems, through extraordinary times, alongside you, the extraordinary people of Maine.

It is an honor to lead a people where everything good is possible and where we believe always, deep in our hearts, ‘the best is yet to come!’

Thank you.

###