

## **The Adjutant General of Maine**

### **Address to a Joint Session of the 126<sup>th</sup> Maine Legislature**

**12 March 2013**

President Alford, Speaker Eves, members of the 126<sup>th</sup> Legislature, distinguished guests, and fellow officers, Soldiers and Airmen of the Maine National Guard: Thank you for the opportunity to come before you today to update you on the status of and the issues affecting our state's military, our emergency management agency, and our veterans. I've been told that I've been allotted roughly 45 minutes – as a sometime lecturer at the University of Maine I tend to have an internal clock that keeps me speaking for exactly 50 minutes, but I'm fairly certain that I can stay within the given time limit. If not, some of you should just start shuffling the papers on your desks and I'll get the message and wrap things up.

I'm honored to be here, and also very conscious that not every leader in state government is afforded the chance to address the legislature as a body. As of tomorrow, I will have been serving as your Adjutant General for seven months, since returning to our state last summer after an assignment in Tampa. After living in Florida for a short time I can honestly say that I doubt I'll ever be a "snow bird;" although I grew up in Massachusetts, I've called Maine home since 1982 and I can truly say it's nice to be back where I belong. Since returning I have been continually struck by the extraordinary support my fellow Mainers provide to those of us in uniform. I want to particularly acknowledge the Governor and First Lady for the generosity and kindness they have consistently shown to our Soldiers and Airmen, their families and our veterans. From talking with our deployed personnel overseas at Christmas, to visiting veterans in their homes and in hospitals, to sending off and then greeting our personnel when they return

home, they have been energetic and genuine in their consideration for all of us. My sincere thanks to them both from all of us in the Maine National Guard.

I recognize that the position which I currently occupy is perhaps somehow different than the other Commissioners in the Executive branch of government, and therefore warrants this honor of addressing the Legislature. The position of The Adjutant General has a long and proud tradition in Maine, commensurate with the long and proud tradition of military service and the volunteer militia in our state. I am the 39<sup>th</sup> Adjutant General of Maine, and on the wall outside my office at Camp Keyes are the portraits and photographs of most of my predecessors dating back to 1820 – men like John L. Hodsdon of Bangor, who held the position for the duration of the Civil War and was responsible for raising, organizing, training and equipping all of Maine’s thirty-two infantry regiments, and the several sharpshooter, cavalry, artillery and other various units from the state which fought in the war. It was Hodsdon, for example, who in 1862 convinced Governor Washburn to appoint a relatively unknown professor of rhetoric from Bowdoin College as the second in command of Maine’s twentieth regiment of volunteer infantry. In a very direct sense then, Maine’s Adjutant General gave Joshua Chamberlain his chance to make history. Each day when I come into work and walk past their pictures on the wall, I hope that I can live up to the example of those officers who have served before me, and do as well as they in discharging their important duties to our state and the nation. I am daily aware that as the Adjutant General I may quite possibly recommend or direct an action that results in another young man or woman being given an opportunity to make history.

The Adjutant General is charged with performing duties which are inherently non-political, and which can potentially affect the people of Maine in ways not usually associated with other cabinet-level positions in the executive. As The Adjutant General I am also the

Commissioner of the state's Department of Defense, Veterans and Emergency Management. I am responsible, therefore, not only for the recruiting, organization, leadership, training, equipping, administration and preparation for war of Maine's Soldiers and Airmen of the National Guard – men and women who manage violence on behalf of the state, either as the result of disaster or external attack here at home or in fighting the enemies of our nation overseas, and who have served with valor in combat in percentages unmatched by most other states not only in the current war, but in most previous wars our country has fought. I am also responsible for the oversight and administration of the Maine Emergency Management Agency, the Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services, and the Maine Military Authority. I will address each of these parts of our department in turn, but before I do I want to briefly outline for you some overall themes and information about the department as a whole, and provide some general information about some of the department's challenges and successes.

We are a department which has at its core an ethos of selfless service to the state and nation, one which is infused with a proud history and tradition of courage, leadership and sacrifice. These values do not solely apply to our National Guard, but to all the other elements of the department as well. Our Emergency Management Agency professionals work long hours planning for emergencies, and training first responders and other citizens around the state to be able to deal with any kind of disaster, whether natural or man-made. They then staff and run the state's emergency operations center and ensure that our citizens, their homes and businesses are taken care of around the clock when those emergencies happen, and make sure that National Guardsmen and other responders from Maine can assist our neighboring states when they are in need. Our Veterans Service Officers work in small offices across the state and travel to nursing homes, residences, businesses and shelters to help our veterans and their families get the

services, medical care and assistance they have earned. We maintain the state's Veterans Cemeteries, ensuring that year-round, rain or shine, our veterans are buried with honor and dignity, and their graves are maintained in pristine fashion in perpetuity. Our workers at the Maine Military Authority in Limestone rebuild, refurbish and upgrade military vehicles and equipment to an extraordinarily high standard so that US servicemen and women around the world can use that equipment to perform their missions successfully.

We do all of these things with little fanfare, and with precious few resources. As all of you are no doubt painfully aware, the fiscal climate of uncertainty in the country right now has placed some significant pressure on all parts of our government, both state and federal. Because of the unique nature of our department, this pressure is felt by us acutely. All of the elements of the department are funded through various formulae by both the state and federal governments. Unlike the Regular military, the National Guard is in part state-funded, and unless it is mobilized for federal service it is commanded by the Governor. Our armories and readiness centers in communities from Caribou and Calais, to Bangor, Brewer and Belfast, and down through Gardiner, Norway, Portland and Sanford, are all maintained and operated with state funds. Our Citizen-Soldiers and Airmen, however, are paid and equipped largely by the federal government. The state's Emergency Operations Center and the professionals who man it are paid for partly by the state and partly through grants provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Department of Homeland Security. The grave stones and niche walls at our cemeteries are paid for by the federal Veterans Administration, but the people who cut the grass and dig the graves, and the Veterans Service Officers who look after our living veterans and their families, are paid for by the state.

As both the federal and state budgets have contracted, our department, like all others, has faced some difficult decisions and pressures, in spite of the administration's efforts to maintain support to our critical capabilities. The Department of Defense, Veterans and Emergency Management, however provides value to our state that is proportionally vastly greater than the resources we are given. For example, in purely financial terms, over the last ten years our department's small state budget has declined significantly – down to last year's budget of only 7.1 million dollars, for a department which employs over 3,500 people with facilities and infrastructure in communities across the state. But with that relatively tiny state budget, last year we brought into our state roughly 327 million federal dollars in military pay, civilian salaries, grants, construction projects and veterans' benefits. All that while responding to two major weather disasters and mobilizing and deploying more than four hundred Soldiers and Airmen to combat theaters world-wide. Beyond the purely fiscal value we provide, we do three fundamental things whose value it is difficult to quantify, but which is undeniable: We provide well-trained, equipped and ready military units of Maine citizen-Soldiers and Airmen for the defense of the state and nation, we prepare for, respond to, recover from and help to mitigate the effects of natural and man-made disasters to the citizens of our state, and we ensure that our military veterans and their families are cared for from the time they leave the service and forever.

The budget pressures we are now experiencing are certainly not catastrophic, but will make it increasingly difficult for us to continue to provide the level of service our state and our citizens have come to expect of us. For example, the amount of money we have been able to provide to counties and municipalities for first responder training and equipment has declined from twenty-two million dollars nine years ago, to less than three million dollars this year – a partial cause of this shortage is that we have had to pay some of our critical employees using

federal grant money, to offset state budget shortfalls. We are facing potential military ammunition reductions and cuts in other training activities that may reduce the readiness of your citizen-Soldiers and Airmen, and make it more difficult to prepare us for combat overseas and for disaster response here at home. All of that while struggling to maintain our aging and in some cases crumbling infrastructure – substandard buildings and facilities in which we expect our Guard Soldiers and Airmen to work and train for war, as well as to operate from during domestic emergencies. And unfortunately, we have to bring our Guard Soldiers and Airmen home to these debilitated facilities when they return from year-long mobilizations fighting for us overseas.

As our direct combat missions in Afghanistan and elsewhere transition to other roles, a debate is shaping up in Washington DC and around the country about what it is that we want our military to do for us, and how we think that military ought to look – size, capabilities, service roles and types of equipment. One of the most critical parts of that debate concerns the future balance we will have between the size of the Active Duty military and the size and capabilities of the National Guard. There are many now in senior leadership and policy-making positions in the services and the Department of Defense who are telling us that the threats to our nation are so many and so serious that we must maintain a large and robust Active military to ensure that we can deal with any possible adversary and contingency. This large Active military would likely be maintained at least partly by cutting the size of the National Guard. Additionally, in order to maintain such an Active military, as we are all again painfully aware, we need to spend Olympian sums of money which it is clear that our country can frankly no longer afford. It is also painfully true that the large federal defense apparatus of this country has had a record of predicting or gauging threats which, unfortunately, is decidedly mixed, at best.

There are many others, however, and I am one of them, who would argue that there is another way to organize our military. The proud tradition of this country, since before we gained our formal independence and for the overwhelming majority of our history, a tradition set in place by people like James Madison, Thomas Jefferson and George Washington, has been to maintain a relatively small, professional and highly capable regular military, and a large, well-trained and responsive militia. This traditional method of organizing and operating the nation's military institutions has succeeded for us in virtually every major war the country has fought. In 1939, for example, on the eve of the Second World War, our Regular Army had less than two-hundred thousand Soldiers, and our National Guard was over four-hundred thousand strong. In 1940 the president federalized the Guard in the face of the impending emergency and was able to almost triple the size of the Active Army overnight. Recent studies by the Pentagon's Reserve Forces Policy Board have demonstrated conclusively that the reserve components of the military, including the National Guard, cost roughly one-third the amount of the regular forces, and provide virtually the same military capability, as shown vividly over the last twelve years. Why then, would we now choose to reverse the successful practices and deeply engrained traditions of our country by maintaining a large and exorbitantly expensive Active military, one which, unlike the National Guard, cannot by law assist civil authorities in a domestic emergency unless under the most dire circumstances and which, divorced from our local communities and outside the control of our citizen legislatures, allows for potentially ill-advised foreign military adventures? Why do we not instead return to the time-tested and proven traditions of our country by shrinking the Active military, growing our National Guard while continuing to invest in its training, equipment and leader development, and therefore maintain a strong and responsive military capacity, both domestic and foreign, under local democratic control at a fraction of the

cost? Finally, to those who would question the utility or responsiveness of the National Guard, I would pose this simple question: When, since 1636, have we not been there when we were needed?

It is important here for me to clarify why it is that I bring up these points concerning our resources and our organization. I do so not to alarm or solicit your sympathy, or to ask you to assign different weights to your budget or policy deliberations. I do so simply because through the medium of this address I am charged with providing you an honest assessment of our capabilities, the trends and issues facing your military and the other important parts of my Department, and to give you my best military advice. It is my hope that with this information all of us can participate fully in the critical debates which will influence Maine's military, veterans and emergency management capacities well into the future.

Regarding capabilities, I'd like to transition here to provide you an update as to the activities and successes over the last year of your Emergency Management Agency, Bureau of Veterans' Services, the Maine Military Authority, and your National Guard.

During the last twelve months the Maine Emergency Management Agency, under the highly capable of leadership of Mr. Robert McAleer, has been very busy. The twenty-nine employees of the Agency have distributed slightly over ten million dollars in training, infrastructure improvement, equipment and system upgrade grants to more than 100 communities and local organizations in the state. They have continued to work closely with our county and municipal authorities, private business and federal partners to assess risks, plan for emergencies, and respond when disaster strikes. We have in the past year continued the process of upgrading and improving the state's communications networks for first responders, and have developed and implemented a new tracking system for the state emergency operations center

which allows us to rapidly assess damage to the power grid and other critical infrastructure, and then ensure that police, firefighters, DOT crews, power crews and other assistance gets to where it is needed, when it is needed. We have been busy outside Maine as well. During hurricane Sandy the Maine Emergency Management Agency simultaneously led the response to assist our affected towns and citizens here, while putting together several teams of professionals from the National Guard, the Department of Transportation, the Department of Conservation, local first responders, volunteers and some key leaders from MEMA itself and dispatching them to assist emergency operations in the Brooklyn area of New York City, the New York City Emergency Operations Center, and in the coastal towns of northern New Jersey. In the coming year Mr. McAleer and the MEMA staff are leading the effort to coordinate Exercise VIGILANT GUARD, a US Northern Command-sponsored interagency response exercise which will test our military, civil and private disaster response capabilities around the state and across New England.

The Maine Bureau of Veterans Services, under the experienced and energetic leadership of Mr. Peter Ogden, has continued to serve our state's veterans and their families in a way that has made them a model for other similar agencies across the nation. With over one-hundred and fifty thousand veterans in our state, Maine has the second highest percentage of veterans per capita in the country, and the thirty-five members of our Veterans Services team continue to work tirelessly to ensure that those veterans are well-served. In our eight field offices located in Caribou, Bangor, Machais, Waterville, at the Togus VA Hospital, Lewiston, Portland, and Springvale, the Bureau during the last twelve months has processed over 2,300 new veterans claims, bringing in over sixty-nine million dollars in medical, pension and educational benefits. We have continued to partner with the federal Veterans Administration, the Togus VA Hospital and our state's Veterans Service organizations to support the annual Homeless Veterans Stand

Down, where together we provide homeless vets and their families winter clothing, medical care, counseling, job training opportunities, and many other services. We are continuing our efforts to reach out to both our women veterans and to the growing population of young men and women who have served more recently – the challenges our women and younger vets face are in many cases of a vastly different nature than those we have dealt with in the past, and we are working to ensure that we provide these vets with the services and opportunities they justly deserve. It is our firm conviction that each Veteran is a national treasure to be respected and supported in the same way in which he or she has selflessly supported all of us and our nation.

The Bureau of Veterans Services works closely with the Maine State Veterans Homes to ensure that our older vets are cared for, and we hold regular meetings with the leaders from Veterans Service Organizations to ensure that our projects and policies are coordinated with what their members both need and desire. Mr. Ogden's team, in cooperation with the state Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and private charitable organizations like The House in the Woods Project, continues to run the Disabled Veterans Moose Hunt, where we are able to bring disabled vets from around the country to Maine, provide them with a moose hunting permit and a registered Maine Guide, and then take them out hunting in our pristine wilderness. The healing aspects of the outdoor experience, coupled with the opportunity to meet and talk with other wounded warriors has been of extraordinary benefit to many of these men and women, to say nothing of what the experience has meant to the volunteers who have given their time, skills and services to make this event possible. Each year we have been able to increase the number of vets we can serve with this program, and this coming year, through the generosity of our state, we will be able to bring twenty men and women, some of them significantly disabled, out into our forests.

The Bureau of Veterans Services is also responsible for running and maintaining the state's Veterans Memorial Cemeteries. We have a cemetery in Caribou, two in Augusta, and one in Springvale, maintained by a dedicated staff of sixteen people. This past year we have continued to upgrade and expand our cemeteries by improving the grounds, increasing the number of available burial plots and niche walls, and working to add structures like committal shelters. Maintaining these facilities remains challenging given our budget constraints and the effects of our weather, but each location has a dedicated volunteer base which helps us in our efforts by raising money, and improving the cemetery with memorials, gardens, and other projects. In the coming year we hope to initiate some significant infrastructure projects at the two main cemeteries in Augusta through a grants program administered by the Veterans Administration – with the growing number of burials at these two locations without these improvements we will begin to run out of space within the next ten years.

A lesser-known but critical part of the department is the Maine Military Authority. Directed by Mr. Tim Corbett and located at the former Loring Air Force Base in Limestone, this organization runs a military equipment rebuilding and refurbishing program for the National Guard Bureau and the Department of Defense. Through cooperative agreements with these agencies the Maine Military Authority employs two hundred twenty-five local people with a payroll of approximately thirteen million dollars, and since 1997 when it started up has rebuilt, refurbished and upgraded thousands of military vehicles, bulldozers, and other pieces of equipment. The Authority has recently completed a ten million dollar improvement and expansion of its facilities in Limestone, allowing for more efficient production and therefore greater time and cost savings. Our team has earned an international reputation for ingenuity and the quality and timeliness of their work, and is in the process of developing additional projects to

rebuild and refurbish busses for our state school districts, as well as municipal busses from Maine and around the northeast.

The largest and most complex part of the Department of Defense, Veterans and Emergency Management is, of course, the Maine National Guard. The National Guard is Maine's military force, our state militia who are charged with the dual role of providing for the defense and security of our citizens here at home, while remaining prepared and available for federal mobilization and deployment in support of missions overseas. The National Guard is made up of two elements – the Air National Guard and the Army National Guard, each which has its own specific organizations and missions.

The newer of the two branches of your military in Maine is the Maine Air National Guard. “The Maineiacs,” commanded by Brigadier General Gerry Bolduc of Bangor, are made up of 1,123 highly trained men and women and are composed of two squadrons located in South Portland - the 265<sup>th</sup> Combat Communications Squadron and the 243<sup>rd</sup> Engineering Installation Squadron - and the 101<sup>st</sup> Air Refueling Wing located in Bangor. Over the past year we have deployed one hundred seventy-five Airmen from Maine on overseas contingency operations in a variety of locations and with a variety of missions that reflect the broad set of skills and competencies of your Air Force.

The two units in South Portland are, as their names suggest, communications and electronics support units. Over the last ten years they have deployed numerous Airmen either as individual experts or in unit packages as part of Air Expeditionary Force missions to support joint service communications and electronics requirements around the world. These two units are also a central part of our National Guard's ability to support civil authorities here in Maine, providing emergency communications capability to state, county and local emergency

management officials, and communications and IT infrastructure support to repair or bypass damaged systems. These units, along with the communications personnel at the wing in Bangor and in the Army National Guard have a growing capability to conduct computer network defense, and as the area of cyber operations continues to grow in importance and complexity, they are poised to expand their capabilities as well.

The 101<sup>st</sup> Air Refueling Wing in Bangor is the largest organization in the Maine Air Guard. The wing provides refueling support in the air and on the ground as part of the Northeast Tanker Task Force – the 101<sup>st</sup> and its partner units in the task force are responsible for refueling all military aircraft, both US and allied, transiting across the Atlantic on the northern route. In this capacity the “Maineiacs” in Bangor have long established themselves as the premier refueling wing in the Air National Guard, and in my humble opinion, in the entire US Air Force. They routinely pump more fuel from their KC-135 aerial tanker aircraft and through their ground facilities than any other unit in the National Guard, and since 2001 they have been on continuous alert, flying daily missions and deploying aircraft and personnel globally to support operations in Iraq, the Arabian Gulf, Afghanistan and elsewhere. As some of you may know, a “Maineiac” KC-135 flew the first refueling mission over Manhattan in support of the combat air patrols established there within minutes after the attacks on September 11, 2001. This December the “Maineiacs” were honored by being the first Air National Guard unit in history to be awarded the Air Force Meritorious Unit Award for superb performance of their mission here in the continental United States. The professionalism, pride and traditions of excellence of our Maine Air National Guard have truly established them as among the top units in the Air Force, and the reputation of your Airmen is globally recognized. Since 2001 their courage and outstanding duty performance have resulted in Maine Air National Guard personnel being awarded one

Distinguished Flying Cross, seven Bronze Star Medals, thirty-four Air Medals and one Purple Heart for wounds received in combat. Quite literally, everywhere around the world people recognize the distinctive insignia of the “Maineiacs,” and when I meet senior Air Force leaders they speak with pride about these Maine men and women who routinely prove that they can accomplish any mission, anytime, anywhere.

The Maine Army National Guard, the oldest and largest part of the Department of Defense, Veterans and Emergency Management, is commanded by Brigadier General Brent Boyles of Mapleton, and is currently made up of 2,100 men and women in a mix of combat, engineer, aviation and logistics units, and two specialized units trained and equipped to respond to Weapons of Mass Destruction and other potentially catastrophic events. Our units are located in Caribou, Houlton, Calais, Bangor, Brewer, Waterville, Skowhegan, Belfast, Augusta, Gardiner, Norway, Westbrook, Portland, Sanford and soon, Brunswick. Since 2001 we have mobilized and deployed 2,897 Soldiers in units and as individual volunteers to, of course, Iraq and Afghanistan, but also to the borders with Canada and Mexico, to Kosovo, Montenegro and Germany. This coming year we are scheduled to deploy five hundred seventy-seven Soldiers worldwide, including the 286<sup>th</sup> Combat Sustainment Support Battalion from Bangor to the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt as part of the Multi-National Force and Observers mission there.

The Maine Army National Guard’s proud history and traditions of valor, sacrifice and leadership continue to be upheld by this current generation of Mainers in uniform. Since 2001 Maine Army Guard Soldiers have been awarded one Silver Star, one-hundred fifty-two Bronze Star Medals – three of which were for Valor under fire, eighty-six Air Medals and seventeen Purple Hearts. We have lost six Soldiers killed in action. Eight Maine Army National Guard units have been awarded the Army Meritorious Unit Commendation for their exemplary

performance of duty in combat, and several individual Maine Soldiers have been awarded the Joint Meritorious Unit Award for their work as embedded trainers with the Afghan Army and Police, as well as in other critical assignments. We have flown over 10,000 hours worth of combat medical evacuation missions, evacuating over 2,150 total patients. In 2010 our Mountain Infantry company from Brewer was specially cited by the commander of US forces in Afghanistan for exemplary performance of its mission fighting Taliban and other extremist infiltration in the mountains along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

During this summer we will send a contingent of Maine Guard Soldiers and Airmen to Gettysburg to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that battle, and to rededicate the monuments of the many Maine units which fought there. While there we will also hold a ceremony with our comrades-in-arms from the Alabama National Guard to honor the Maine and Alabama Soldiers who fought each other on Little Round Top – at that ceremony will be the current commanders and regimental colors of Maine’s 133<sup>rd</sup> Engineer Battalion and Alabama’s 167<sup>th</sup> Infantry, the direct descendants of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine Infantry and the 15<sup>th</sup> Alabama Infantry who fought there in 1863. This event will be particularly poignant because the 167<sup>th</sup> Infantry will have just returned less than a month before from a year in Afghanistan, and the 133<sup>rd</sup> Engineers will be departing for Afghanistan in August on their second combat deployment since 2004.

The Maine Army National Guard currently has one hundred Soldiers from Waterville’s 488<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company and eight members of our fixed-wing aviation detachment serving in Afghanistan. Four members of the state’s 120<sup>th</sup> Public Affairs Detachment are serving in Kosovo. We were very happy last month to bring home Bangor’s Company C, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 126<sup>th</sup> Aviation – our state’s air medevac company – from their third operational deployment

since 2004. Our state's military fiscal contracting team also just returned from a year in Afghanistan.

Our Guard Soldiers and Airmen have been busy here at home as well. Maine Soldiers responded to Hurricane Irene in Vermont in 2011, and we sent a team of Soldiers and Airmen to New York to assist during Hurricane Sandy more recently. Last month we sent a detachment of Engineers from Caribou's 185<sup>th</sup> Engineer Company to assist Connecticut in recovering from the recent blizzard – The Adjutant General of Connecticut told me that our County Soldiers made sure their counterparts from southern New England knew that the three feet of snow they had dumped on them was nothing more, in their opinion, than a mild dusting.

The Maine National Guard continues to exemplify our state's motto, "Dirigo," by leading nationally in most of our critical readiness indicators. Our Army Guard remains within the top five in the nation in recruiting new Soldiers and re-enlisting trained Soldiers, and last month we were rated first in the nation for personnel readiness. This past year our Air National Guard Recruiting Team was awarded the Air Force Regional Recruiting and Retention Award for maintaining one hundred percent strength in their units. Our logisticians have received numerous regional and national awards in the last year for their careful stewardship of resources and equipment, including the national Army Supply Excellence Award given to our state headquarters supply team. Our state's joint Air and Army Guard Marksmanship Team competed last month in the Army's national marksmanship competition, where they were awarded no less than sixteen individual and team first, second and third place trophies, including first place in the team rifle and pistol competitions, and they finished second place overall in the nation. And finally, in another example of the cooperation between the various parts of the Department, our state Select Military Honor Guard just recently performed their 9000<sup>th</sup> military funeral, in

partnership with the Bureau of Veterans Services, and the team is projected to perform their 10,000<sup>th</sup> funeral sometime later this year.

I started this presentation by discussing the many and serious challenges, both fiscal and organizational, which we face in the Department of Defense, Veterans and Emergency Management. As I have tried to show you, these fiscal challenges will cause us all to have to make some difficult decisions and may potentially degrade or reduce the ability of this department to provide our citizens with the critical protection, services and defense capabilities that they are used to having. We minimize these challenges at considerable risk. Because our organization is locally based and made up of our friends, neighbors and relatives, for many of us these risks take on a very personal connotation. I ask for your help in contributing your voices and your leadership to the growing national debate about the relative size, cost and capabilities of our National Guard. This is a critical time for our military nationally, and we cannot afford to allow decisions to be made in Washington without ensuring that our views and interests as Mainers are understood and acknowledged.

Finally, I must tell you that, in spite of uncertainties, challenges, pressures and hardships, the men and women of your Emergency Management Agency, your Bureau of Veterans Services and the Soldiers and Airmen of your Maine National Guard will always be here. We will always be ready to respond to your call, and to the call of the nation to protect our citizens' lives and property, defend their homes and their interests, and look after our honored veterans when they return from service. Integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all that we do. Quite plainly, that is who we are, and that is what we commit ourselves to for our great state. That commitment is embodied in the venerable colors displayed in the hall outside this chamber, and on the colors our National Guard Soldiers and Airmen carry with them into action today. We are

ever-conscious of the Maine people who have gone before us in service to the state and nation, and we will never allow the reputation we and they have built for selflessness and dedication, for valor and sacrifice, to be tarnished. I remain deeply honored to lead this superb organization, and look forward to working with all of you as we address our challenges in the months and years to come. Thank you all again for the honor of speaking to you today.

*Bayonets Forward!*