



Senator MIKE CARPENTER

DISTRICT 2: Proudly Representing the People of Southern Aroostook and Northern Penobscot Counties

Dear friends,

To say that 2020 has been a whirlwind would be an understatement. When the Legislature reconvened in January, I returned to Augusta ready to deliver for Maine families, workers, small businesses and our communities. My colleagues and I never expected to be grappling with a deadly pandemic and its devastating consequences, both personal and economic.

“As Mainers, we solve our greatest problems by getting people around the table and working together.”

There are few memories that I can think of when Maine and the world were affected so drastically as now. As the son of potato farmers, I know what it is like to have a bad harvest and how that could devastate families. As a Vietnam War veteran, I've experienced great loss. This pandemic is a different type of crisis. It has closed businesses, hurt families and taken the lives of loved ones. These challenges may be unprecedented, but the way we respond to them isn't. As Mainers, we solve our greatest problems by getting people around the table and working together.

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, my colleagues and I didn't let up. This year, lawmakers worked to:

- **Fix our broken health care system** – I supported a suite of laws that put patients before profits. The new laws restrict surprise and abusive billing practices, and cap the out-of-pocket cost of insulin.

- **Fight for rural health care** – People should have access to ambulance services, regardless of whether they live in Bangor or Blaine. I sponsored a bill to create the Central Aroostook Emergency Services to make sure the folks of Blaine, Bridgewater and Mars Hill had uninterrupted ambulance coverage.

- **Support Maine small businesses** – Small businesses are the backbones of our economy, and I worked to get businesses back on their feet, like Tiny Homes of Maine based in Houlton, and by advocating for and answering questions from small business owners during the pandemic.

This year, we made a lot of progress but our work is not over. I want you to know that I'm still here, working for you and your family. It's why I voted twice to reconvene the Legislature so we could finish delivering for you. I still believe in the unbreakable spirit of County folks. Together, we can build a state that works for Maine people. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me at Mike.Carpenter@legislature.maine.gov or by calling (207) 532-8197.

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Supporting Maine seniors

As Mainers, we stand on the shoulders of the generations that came before us. We owe it to our seniors to be there when they need us most. We started the session in January by increasing funding for Maine's nursing homes and residential care facilities. In light of the COVID-19 crisis, we gave further support to nursing homes in the supplemental budget.

To support the dedicated people who care for our seniors, we pushed to increase reimbursement rates for direct care workers. The long-term care commission also released recommendations to strengthen this critical part of Maine's workforce. These proposals have been carried forward for further action.



Volunteering at my church's annual Thanksgiving Dinner last year.

Responding to COVID-19

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Legislature passed bipartisan laws to support Maine families, seniors, small businesses and public health. **We approved a responsible spending package that prioritized public health nursing, Maine's CDC and senior care. It also grew the Rainy Day Fund to \$258 million, a historic high.** We expanded unemployment benefits, made sure students wouldn't go hungry, prohibited utility companies from cutting off service, and put \$11 million into a COVID-19 fund.

Since we adjourned, I've worked with countless Mainers to get their unemployment benefits, access critical resources, and address other challenges. But shortcomings in the unemployment system, inadequate staffing and other problems left many struggling to access their benefits. **We must fix our broken unemployment system so it's there for Mainers in a crisis.**

At the same time, many small businesses, like mine, have been hit particularly hard. I've called for the Mills Administration and the federal government to do more to help our small businesses, including agricultural businesses, stay afloat.

The stories are often heartbreaking, but I was elected to fight for you. I will continue to advocate for you and our local economy on the Economic Recovery Committee, which is bringing together Maine stakeholders and the administration to chart a path forward.



With fellow veterans at the Hodgdon JMG Veterans Day breakfast in November 2019.

Fighting for Maine veterans

As a Vietnam veteran, I know all too well the challenges our servicemen and women can face when they return home to civilian life. We must support our veterans to successfully transition back into our communities and economy. It's why I introduced a Veterans Bill of Rights proposal this year that will bolster resources for Maine's veterans.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic cut our progress short. That's why I voted twice to reconvene the Legislature, so we can finish our work. I was disappointed that most of my Republican colleagues did not join me in this.

In the meantime, **I worked to secure \$100,000 in grant funding from the Attorney General's Office for United Veterans of Maine in Caribou.** This nonprofit is dedicated to helping Aroostook County veterans gain crucial access to safe housing, Veterans Affairs benefits, job training and more. Now, more local veterans can get the support they need while we wait to pass the Veterans Bill of Rights into law.

I am proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with our veterans in Maine and want to thank the Attorney General for his attention to this issue.



Speaking with a constituent at an event in Presque Isle.

“Sen. Carpenter helped pass a bill that was crucial for our business to survive in Aroostook County. His professionalism and determination to get us back up and running was impressive. I am grateful he was able to work with all the stakeholders in Augusta to get the legislation passed before the Legislature adjourned in response to COVID.”

-Corinne Watson, Tiny Homes of Maine



Visiting JM Huber Corporation, which makes engineered wood products in Easton.

Standing up for Maine's small business community

Maine small businesses are a critical part of our communities and our economy. So when a constituent reached out to me about needless new restrictions threatening to take down Maine's tiny home industry, **I worked with her to pass a law that eliminates the red tape so her business could continue to grow right here in The County.**

Throughout this pandemic, Maine businesses have gone above and beyond to keep people healthy and safe, whether it's shifting to curbside pickup or to manufacturing personal protective equipment. Now, they deserve our support.

As the pandemic has highlighted, reliable, high-speed internet is essential for businesses, education and telehealth. This year, we worked with farmers and business leaders to expand internet access in underserved areas by passing a \$15 million broadband bond and making it easier for communities to get broadband grants. Part of sustaining our economy is training the next generation of workers. **This year, we invested an additional \$1.6 million in career and technical education, and \$2 million more for new equipment to help Mainers train for good-paying Maine jobs.**

When the Legislature reconvenes, we need to do more. I hope to pass measures to support Maine-based companies and goods whenever taxpayer dollars are spent, create good-paying jobs, support emerging industries and help Maine companies get back on their feet.

Fixing our broken health care system

Too often the high cost of health care prevents hardworking Mainers from getting basic medical care. This is true whether it's the cost of prescription drugs, outrageous health insurance premiums or surprise medical bills. Enough is enough — my colleagues and I stood up to change that.

In 2019, we took on “Big Pharma” and won, passing an aggressive prescription drug reform package. These new laws improve drug price transparency, hold corporate middlemen accountable, create an affordability board, and allow for wholesale prescription drug importation from Canada. Living in the County, you know that our neighbors to the north pay a fraction of what we do for the same prescriptions. This year, we adopted a plan to implement wholesale importation and are now waiting on federal approval.

In 2020, I supported a suite of bills designed to put patients before profits. We clamped down on abusive billing practices and patient fees that nickel and dime families at every turn. I also worked to preserve basic patient protections, improve coverage of telehealth medicine and fund rural hospitals, including hospitals in Houlton and Presque Isle.

I'm most proud of our work to establish Central Aroostook Emergency Medical Services. In December, the towns of Blaine, Bridgewater and Mars Hill learned that they would no longer receive ambulance services through a private company they previously relied on. In response, I sponsored a new law that allowed the three towns to join forces to maintain an ambulance service in Central Aroostook County.



Chatting with employees of Northern A.R. Gould Hospital in Presque Isle to learn more about the challenges they experience in treating patients in rural Maine.

2020 Legislative Report
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SURVEY: I want to hear from you!

1. What is your biggest concern in the wake of COVID-19?

- Keeping your family safe and healthy
- Making sure you can pay your bills
- Supporting struggling small businesses
- Addressing racial disparities in COVID-19 cases
- Reopening the state's economy
- Protecting good-paying jobs
- Other (please specify):

2. What should Maine's focus be as we restart our economy?

- Providing direct relief to workers
- Keeping workers healthy and safe
- Providing direct relief to businesses
- Supporting Maine's tourism industry
- Investing in high-speed, reliable internet
- Other (please specify):

3. COVID-19 has exposed key health care challenges in Maine. What is the biggest challenge you face?

- High cost of prescription drugs
- High cost of health care coverage
- Surprise medical bills and fees

- Lack of medical services in our area
- Other (please specify):

4. COVID-19 has also exposed where Maine still needs work. What should be our biggest priority next year?

- Making sure more people can get health care
- Expanding high-speed, reliable internet
- Investing in education, career tech and child care
- Improving access to affordable housing
- Protecting natural resources
- Other (please specify):

5. What grade would you give Maine's COVID-19 response? _____

I appreciate your comments. Please feel free to contact me anytime if I may ever be of assistance.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

To fill out this survey online,
go to www.mainesenate.org/2020Survey