

Houlton Rotary Remarks
Senator Susan M. Collins
May 2, 2016

Thank you, Chris. I appreciate this opportunity to speak with you today. I really appreciate being back in The County.

Whenever I visit Rotary Clubs throughout Maine, I always am impressed by the many ways Rotarians place “Service Above Self.” This club serves in so many ways, but what especially impresses me is your focus on literacy. One of my first jobs growing up was reading to children at the Caribou Library. The importance of instilling in children a love of reading has stayed with me ever since. As a Senator, I have visited more than 200 schools throughout Maine, and I always enjoy reading books by Maine authors to the younger children.

I was delighted to learn about the *Maliseet Language Picture Booklet*, which is an outstanding project by this club and this district. I commend Leigh Cummings for leading this collaboration with the Band of Maliseet Indians on both sides of the border. This booklet will help Maliseet children strengthen their pride in their heritage and culture. Just as important, it will remind us all of the contributions made by the First People of this region.

Let me speak about a couple of issues that are among my priorities in Washington. As you may know, I chair the Senate Special Committee on Aging. I sought this leadership position because Maine is the oldest state in the nation by median age. By the way, it probably won’t surprise any of you to know that Aroostook County has a higher median age than the rest of the state.

I also felt that issues affecting older Americans were not getting sufficient attention given the changing demographics not only of our state but also of our nation. My three priorities for the Committee have been improving retirement security, supporting biomedical research, and stopping fraud and financial exploitation targeting our seniors. Let me touch briefly on the Committee’s work to combat scams aimed at our seniors.

The Aging Committee recently released a comprehensive anti-fraud resource guide designed to provide information to help protect seniors from some of the most prevalent and malicious scams. I have brought some copies of the guides with me today; please feel free to take them with you. The booklet was compiled using data from the Aging Committee’s Fraud Hotline, which is staffed by experienced fraud investigators who help callers combat fraud and refer victims to the appropriate authorities. The guide reflects the hearings that we have held to expose scams that the Government Accountability Office estimates defraud seniors of more than \$2.9 billion a year.

The most common fraud reported to the Fraud Hotline is the IRS impersonation scam, which is particularly prevalent during tax season. Con artists call, pretend to be IRS agents, and demand immediate payment of so-called “back taxes.” I received three of these calls myself at my home in Bangor. They threaten the consumer with arrest, foreclosure, or liens unless the so-called “back taxes” are paid immediately. The fact is that the IRS will never call a taxpayer prior

to sending a detailed letter outlining the taxes owed and providing an opportunity for appeal or dispute, and the agency will never threaten to have the person arrested if money is not sent immediately. Those are red flags that this is a scam.

These scam phone calls often involve a disguised, or “spoofed,” caller ID to make the victim believe that the call is coming from the U.S. Department of the Treasury or the IRS. The ability to disguise the true origin of the telephone number has greatly undermined the “Do Not Call Registry,” which was intended to protect consumers from such calls.

I chaired an Aging Committee hearing last year that examined this troubling scam. Sergeant Jason Moore of the Lewiston Police Department testified about his efforts to help an IRS imposter scam victim.

The senior was contacted by a con artist who called from a spoofed number and claimed to be from the IRS. The victim was ultimately coerced into sending the scammer tens of thousands of dollars for alleged “back taxes.” After she sent the money, the victim grew suspicious and contacted Sergeant Moore. Due to the Sergeant’s quick actions, he was able to stop a pending wire transfer of \$11,000 from being sent to the con artist. Unfortunately, it is typically extremely difficult to recover money once it has been sent to the scammer. Working with AARP and the Area Agencies on Aging, I am attempting to alert seniors to these scams and to urge them to just hang up the phone.

Our veterans are another group that is the focus of my efforts in Washington as a member of the Military Construction -Veterans Administration Appropriations Subcommittee. I know how important it is for our veterans in Northern Maine to be able to receive their healthcare as close to home as possible. That is why I have supported the Community Based Outpatient Clinics in communities around the state, including the Caribou CBOC and the two satellite clinics in Fort Kent and here in Houlton. Houlton Regional Hospital should be commended for its continued efforts to make that clinic available to area veterans.

This April, I worked to secure a two-year extension of the vital Access Received Closer to Home, or ARCH program. It has been approved by the Appropriations Committee and will likely be considered by the full Senate next week. This program has proven to be a true “life-line” for Northern Maine veterans because it provides them medical care in their communities, close to home and their families. And I continue to fight to resolve the many problems veterans are experiencing with VA-Choice. We must fulfill our sacred obligation to the men and women who have worn our nation’s uniform and served on our behalf.

One of the best parts of being your Senator is having the opportunity to travel all over this great state to meet with people who are doing extraordinary things. I never cease to be amazed by the creativity of Mainers and the incredible work that is happening here in a quiet way. I have met with Maine business leaders, entrepreneurs, and employees, as well as academic and civic leaders who are having success in providing good jobs and strengthening our communities.

Maine's downtowns are coming back. Empty storefronts are being replaced by creative shops, new businesses, and great restaurants. This resurgence is apparent in every corner of the state, including in the Shiretown. The new downtown redevelopment program and spec building project will keep this progress moving.

American manufacturing is supposed to be a thing of the past, but there are many examples of its success and revival here in Southern Aroostook County. Smith and Wesson is expanding and creating even more good jobs. Tate and Lyle is the only facility of its type in the entire United States. Louisiana Pacific is known for its high-quality building materials.

Speaking of building materials, there's another company in this neck of the woods I'm kind of proud of. The longevity and community involvement of S.W. Collins demonstrate the values that define The County.

The strength of Maine's manufacturing industry is the result of our state's hardworking and highly skilled workforce, as well as innovative small businesses that are able to find a niche. For instance, Dave Harbison, the President of Bison Pumps in Houlton, developed a hand water pump for deep wells in the wake of the ice storm of '98. Bison Pumps now sells its products around the world.

The Houlton Water Company provides the lowest-cost electricity in New England. The revitalized Houlton Airport is an asset to business. I strongly supported the Three Ring Binder initiative to expand access to high-speed internet in rural Maine. Pioneer Broadband is putting those new fiber-optic lines to good use and connecting The County to the world.

Of course, you cannot be from Aroostook and not talk about agriculture, a mainstay of the economy. The increasing interest in knowing where food comes from and the demand for local products has led to an increase in the number of farmers that we have in this state – reversing a decades' long trend away from agriculture.

Aurora Mills and Farm is helping to lead this trend. By growing and grinding organic grain for Maine's burgeoning craft beer industry, Matt and Linda Williams are supporting an important economic-growth sector as they add value to Maine agricultural products. Twenty years ago, Dick York started with two acres and a dream of growing organic vegetables. Today, Nature's Circle Farm is meeting the increasing demand for wholesome produce and is a leader in producing organic seed potatoes.

With all the challenges that we face, good things are happening every day in Maine. We should celebrate the successes that can be found in every corner of our State. The Maine values of innovation, community, and hard work that you embody are what make Maine a truly special place to live. I am very optimistic about our future in Maine, and it continues to be an honor to represent you in the United States Senate.

Thank you for the invitation to join you today. I would be happy to take your questions.