



STATE OF MAINE
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
1 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE
04333-0001

Paul R. LePage
GOVERNOR

June 8, 2015

Bill Brown, chair
Board of Directors
Maine Academy of Natural Sciences
P.O. Box 159
Hinckley, ME 04944

Jack Moore, chair
Executive Committee
Good Will-Hinckley
P.O. Box 159
Hinckley, ME 04944

Dear Mr. Brown and Mr. Moore:

I write with serious concerns over the reported selection of Speaker of the House Mark Eves as the new president of Good Will-Hinckley, which runs Maine Academy of Natural Sciences, a charter school. As a former at-risk youth myself, I question the ability of Speaker Eves to lead the mission of the Maine Academy of Natural Sciences and administer the difficult and unique challenges faced by each of its students.

As you well know, Speaker Eves has been a longtime opponent of public charter schools. Backed by union bosses who consistently put partisan politics over the best interests of Maine students, he has voted against legislation that would support or create public charter schools.

- In 2012, Speaker Eves voted in opposition to "An Act To Amend and Clarify the Public Charter School Law."
- In 2011, Speaker Eves was absent for the vote on "An Act To Create a Public Charter School Program in Maine."
- In 2009, Speaker Eves voted against "An Act To Permit Charter Schools in Maine."

A news release by Speaker Eves, dated February 6, 2013 and posted on his website, states it is a myth that school choice benefits each and every Maine student and that 37 percent of charter schools actually offered children a worse education than traditional schools.

In a news release dated March 22, 2013 and posted on the Maine Dems website, Eves objected to our proposal to provide \$1 million for lawyer fees for the Maine Charter School Commission, the State Board of Education and the Department of Education.

This attempt to provide these legal fees was a reflection of the politically charged atmosphere between strident opponents of charter schools – such as Speaker Eves — and supporters of educational opportunities for all Maine students.

In the release, Speaker Eves states: "The Governor's priorities are out of step with the parents, students, and teachers of Maine."

On behalf of all who have worked so hard to ensure every Maine student has access to an education that is best suited to their individual needs, I must question your boards' decision to appoint a person so adamantly opposed to charter schools as president of the organization that runs one of Maine's most prominent charter schools.



PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

A release on the MeANS website states interim president Rich Abramson has “over 40 years of experience as a Maine teacher and public school superintendent and an equally long track record as a leader on how to best educate, nurture and support non-traditional students.” Speaker Eves has no such background.

Although he is employed as a family therapist, I have seen firsthand that his skills in conflict resolution, leadership, negotiation and reconciliation are sadly deficient. While Speaker Eves is eager to state publicly that he and I have a good relationship, it is simply not true. He has not been an honest broker with me on issues that are of great important to the people of Maine.

I must also question how Speaker Eves would find the time to devote himself fully to the school and to his role as Speaker of the House. He would have to choose whether to shortchange the students he oversees or the people of Berwick, Maine he claims to represent.

Finally, and most troubling, is the unabashed political patronage on which this selection is based. Speaker Eves hired Mr. Brown to work full time as his Special Assistant for Budget and Policy in his State House office. Now he is chair of the board that is helping to select him as president of MeANS. A subordinate turning around and influencing his board to hire his boss for a high-paying job would not only be unethical, but also a major conflict of interest.

In addition, Erik Jorgensen, another member of the MeANS board, was appointed by Speaker Eves to the Legislature’s powerful Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee when he was a freshman legislator. This represents the kind of political cronyism Democrats have engaged in for decades, unbeknownst to the hard-working Maine people who are footing the bill. This is why Speaker Eves fights every effort to reform Maine’s government.

It is unfortunate for both Maine taxpayers and Maine students that the education system has become a soft-landing place for unqualified former Democratic politicians who seek exorbitant salaries but bring no real skills or true leadership to the important public positions entrusted to them.

The Maine Academy of Natural Sciences has been an exemplary charter school. Hiring a longtime opponent of charter schools to lead it would not only besmirch the reputation of MeANS and Good Will-Hinckley, but it would also be a grave disservice to the students who come there expecting exceptional educational opportunities provided by well-qualified and highly respected faculty.

Our students – and our taxpayers – deserve better than hirings based on political patronage. I ask that you and your boards continue the selection process until you find a president that is truly qualified to lead Good Will-Hinckley and The Maine Academy of Natural Sciences and the students it serves.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul R. LePage". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "P" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Paul R. LePage
Governor