

# You Can Get There From Here: Growing Maine's Rural Economy

## U.S. SENATOR ANGUS KING

April 3, 2017

### 1. INCREASE BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE

Access to high-speed internet is an economic necessity for our rural communities. Rural broadband is essential infrastructure that can open access to new markets, support innovation, create greater online learning options, provide access to telemedicine, enable growth in at-home business startups, and allow more seniors to age at home. During his time in office, Senator King has [supported](#) the modernization of federal broadband programs – including the FCC's E-rate program, which supports school and library internet access. He has also [fought for](#) amendments in the recently-enacted Every Student Succeeds Act to allow rural students better access to the internet outside of the classroom.

To build upon this work, Senator King plans to:

- Lead a bipartisan push for funding to support broadband deployment as part of congressional efforts to fund a major investment in infrastructure projects.
- Support bipartisan efforts to increase funding for rural wireless deployment and connectivity through the FCC Mobility Fund.
- Promote, through legislation and advocacy to federal agencies, the modernization of programs that support rural broadband and telehealth, and work to streamline regulatory barriers to broadband deployment.

### 2. STRENGTHEN MAINE'S FOREST ECONOMY

Maine's forest products industry is a significant driver in the Maine economy, even as rapid market changes have also resulted in mill closures that have profoundly impacted Maine's rural communities. To create and retain jobs and strengthen the future of Maine's forest economy, Senator King [spearheaded](#) the creation of a public-private partnership to grow and diversify Maine's forest products industry. The resulting effort – an interagency Economic Development Assessment Team (EDAT), led by the Department of Commerce – has committed millions of dollars in federal funding to grow Maine's forest industry, supported efforts to redevelop closed industrial sites, and worked to strengthen rural communities.

To follow up on the recommendations of the EDAT's [report](#), Senator King will:

- Support the growth of existing and new markets for Maine wood fiber, particularly low value soft wood, and fight to include Maine forest products-based biofuel in the Renewable Fuel Standard.
- Support a wide range of commercialization efforts, including the partnership between UMaine and Oak Ridge National Labs, to promote the development of forest-based feedstocks for additive manufacturing, and emerging wood technologies, such as Cross-Laminated Timber.
- Work with the EPA and FERC to improve relicensing procedures to ensure that conflicting regulations do not slow down economic development.
- Encourage investments and technical assistance from the Department of Transportation to improve transportation efficiencies to increase profitability in the forest industry.

- Support the redevelopment of former mill industrial sites and rural community development efforts to improve local infrastructure.

### 3. GROW MAINE'S WORKFORCE

With the aging of the Baby Boomer generation, Maine faces particular challenges in replacing retiring workers. Because the state's economic vitality in the coming years depends upon its ability to produce and attract skilled workers for the jobs of the future, Senator King believes that the federal government should make it easier for people with disabilities to reenter the workforce. He also [supports](#) helping other workers who currently are sidelined to get back on the economic ladder, including older workers, people receiving public assistance, and new parents struggling with the cost of childcare. He has also [supported](#) federal funding opportunities to support growing companies in Maine's information technology (IT) industries, like the TechHire program, which has provided \$4 million in funding to the state to expand its pool of qualified IT and computer science professionals.

To build upon that work, Senator King will:

- Introduce legislation to provide grants that support locally-led workforce development, job creation, and economic resilience and diversification in economically-distressed communities.
- Continue to [urge](#) the Social Security Administration to simplify work incentives for Disability Insurance recipients.
- Push for changes to the federal welfare program, through his [EMPOWER Act](#), and to child care tax policies, through his [PACE Act](#), to encourage more people on the sidelines to reenter the workforce.
- Support educational, technical assistance, and work-in-place opportunities in rural communities to increase worker participation in the gig economy.

### 4. IMPROVE ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HEALTHCARE

Health care and hospitals are significant job creators in the rural Maine economy, with hospitals being the largest employer in eight Maine counties. The Affordable Care Act (ACA) and the Medicare program are essential to delivering care in rural areas. Cuts to Medicare or the elimination of the ACA could leave tens of thousands of Mainers either dependent upon charity care or unable to access care that is in their community. Rural hospitals have clearly indicated that without a base of covered patients they are at risk of reducing services and staff. Senator King has hosted a [series](#) of rural hospital and provider roundtables to better understand the impact of an ACA repeal, and he has [pushed for](#) several responsible fixes to improve the ACA. He has also been an outspoken advocate for Congress to do more to stem the opioid addiction epidemic by [fighting](#) to expand access to Medication Assisted Treatment and [pressuring](#) the DEA to crack down on opioid production.

To continue his work in this space, Senator King plans to:

- Fight against the repeal of the ACA until a viable replacement plan has been proposed.
- Continue to address the rural opioid crisis by exploring options for the design of creative programs that can provide prevention, treatment, and support services closer to home.
- Push to expand the range of services that can be offered at Community Health Centers.
- Work to lower drug prices for seniors by pushing [legislation](#) that would allow Medicare to negotiate the price of prescription drugs.

## 5. SUPPORT MAINE MANUFACTURERS

Senator King believes that Maine manufacturers deserve to compete on a level playing field. He has fought back against currency manipulation and [supported](#) Maine businesses petitioning for fairer trading practices at the U.S. International Trade Commission. And in a major victory for the hardworking Mainers employed at New Balance factories, Senator King [worked](#) with the rest of the Maine delegation to include language in the National Defense Authorization Act that requires the Department of Defense to issue U.S.-made athletic shoes for recruits.

In continuing his fight for Maine manufacturers, Senator King plans to:

- Work to advance legislation that would make the “Made in USA” standard easier to use without weakening the standard.
- Push to ensure that the Defense Department follows through on the requirement to buy American-made shoes.
- Building upon the success of the Berry Amendment footwear provision, promote additional “Buy America” provisions to support domestic manufacturers.
- Leverage the full arsenal of federal tools available to enforce U.S. law on behalf of Maine’s producers.

## 6. PROMOTE MAINE-MADE ENERGY

Maine is blessed with an abundance of natural resources, from its woods and rivers to its winds and tides. Despite these gifts, Mainers still pay too much for their power, and Maine should be producing more energy at lower prices from its many local resources. As a member of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, Senator King has made energy policy a top priority and has [fought](#) for tax credits to promote the use of energy-efficient biomass heating systems. He has also [pushed](#) a proposal to make electric companies provide better options to consumers who contribute clean and efficient energy to the grid.

To continue to fight for cheaper, cleaner energy, Senator King will:

- Introduce legislation to urge the Department of Energy to more carefully study and limit liquefied natural gas exports that could hurt Maine energy consumers.
- Champion policies that will incentivize hydro-operators to continue to create clean energy in our state.
- Work to ensure clean, off-the-grid energy is treated fairly through reasonable rates and policies.

## 7. BOLSTER THE FUTURE OF MAINE FARMS

Agriculture in Maine is a diverse and critical element of the state’s economy. Maine farms provide a full market basket of goods, from blueberries, maple syrup, potatoes, and dairy to beer, wine, cheese and meats. Senator King has been a strong advocate for the federal policies that support, not impede, the development of the infrastructure and systems to develop and expand the opportunities to create value-added products as well as efforts to get all products from land- and sea-based farms to market. In 2013, when the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) draft rules did not clearly reflect the needs of small and mid-sized farms, Senator King joined his colleagues to send a [letter](#) to the Food and Drug Administration requesting that the agency hold informational hearings in New England to listen to farmers’ concerns. Those meetings ultimately resulted in adjustments to the final rules that addressed many concerns of Maine farmers.

The 2018 Farm Bill will provide additional opportunities to promote agriculture policies designed to meet the scale and type of Maine farms. To that end, Senator King plans to:

- Reintroduce the [PRIME Act](#) with Senator Rand Paul (R-KY) in order to increase a state's ability to provide consumers with locally processed meats.
- Support farmers market provisions in the Farm Bill that will expand opportunities for seniors and low-income residents to purchase fresh, local foods with SNAP benefits.
- Push for organic certification options for aquaculture and hydroponic products.
- Create USDA program set-asides for veteran farmers to assist them in starting agricultural businesses.

## **8. ENHANCE MAINE'S RECREATIONAL ECONOMY**

Maine's abundant natural resources provide access to a wealth of recreational activities – from hunting to hiking to snowmobiling – for longtime residents and visitors alike. Senator King believes in protecting our natural resources for traditional uses and has supported public access to key parcels in the state. He also [hosted](#) public input sessions when the Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument was being considered so that the National Park Service could hear directly from Maine constituents about their concerns and hopes.

To continue his support of Maine's natural resources, Senator King will:

- Introduce legislation that will incentivize private landowners to allow public access on their property – a time-honored Maine tradition.
- Continue his support of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which provides funding to support the protection of public land and provide for important recreational programs for students across Maine.
- Work to ensure that the National Park Service (NPS) remains a good neighbor to Maine's communities and urge the NPS to address its maintenance backlog.

## **9. HELP MAINE'S SENIORS AGE INDEPENDENTLY AT HOME**

Older Mainers overwhelmingly want to age in their own homes. But there can be obstacles to safely aging in place, including the lack of basic accessibility features in our state's older housing stock and the cumulative cost of necessary home modifications. Senator King has [introduced](#) bipartisan legislation that would help make it easier for seniors to access federal home modification resources that can enable them to remain in their homes longer, and he also [supports](#) providing a federal tax credit for working family caregivers who financially help their parents, spouses, children with disabilities, or other loved ones.

To build upon that work, Senator King will:

- Introduce legislation that allows for Medicare reimbursement for preventive health services, such as home modifications or medical equipment that is permanently installed in the home, in order to prevent falls.
- Support organizations like Meals on Wheels and Area Agencies on Aging that help older Americans live independently in their communities.
- Build a bipartisan coalition in support of proposals that help seniors age safely and independently in place.