Remarks of Gregory W. Powell
Harold Alfond Foundation

Maine College of Engineering, Computing, and Information Science
Kickoff Visioning Workshop

Thursday, January 21, 2021
Virtual Meeting

Thank you, Kim-Marie. And thank you, Chancellor Malloy, for your opening remarks this morning.

On behalf of the Harold Alfond Foundation, I am honored to be with you all via Zoom to help kick off this visioning workshop.

Harold Alfond had a very basic vision for Maine: one in which, through teamwork and partnership, all people could thrive from birth through career. And he believed education was very much the foundation to that success.

In keeping with Harold's vision and belief in education, the work of his Foundation today is focused on supporting high-quality education in Maine. This includes investing in academic programs that meet our workforce needs and position our state and its people for long-term economic success.

In line with these priorities, we are very proud to support the launch of the new Maine College of Engineering, Computing, and Information Science. Our investment in this College is part of a larger grant we announced last year of up to $240 million to the University of Maine System.

We made this commitment because we believe in the future of this state, we believe in you, and we believe that the University System is vital to a bigger, better, and more prosperous future for Maine and its people as we emerge from the hardship of the pandemic.

We see this new College as especially vital to our state's future at this moment in time. Let me state briefly why.

Our state has an aging population and a declining skilled workforce. These demographics have been facing us for many years. To be prosperous in our modern global economy, we need to increase

and modernize the skills of our labor force. This is particularly important in the growing technical fields that demand workers and where the U.S. has an advantage competing across the world. As we will hear later this morning from Dean Humphrey, there is a significant shortfall of qualified graduates for Maine's engineering, computer, and information science jobs. The ability to build, attract, and retain businesses in the state is dependent on us having a well-prepared technical workforce.

While these challenges and corresponding needs have been with us for many years, the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated these challenges and accentuated the needs. That said, the pandemic has also, perhaps surprisingly, set the stage for opportunity, new growth, and development in our state.

COVID-19 has shown us that remote work is possible. Studies have shown that a few select large cities in our nation have profited greatly from the advances of the modern tech economy. The pandemic has made such large cities less desirable places to live and work. And it has made the rural state of Maine a more attractive place to live and work, if only to work remotely. Since the start of the pandemic, we have seen an influx of people between the ages of 24 and 35 move to the state. And with this new College, we can make sure our citizens, young and old, have access to high-quality education to build their skill sets in the ways that will continue to advance our economy.

With all of this said, the launch of the Maine College of Engineering, Computing, and Information Science could not come at a more opportune time. A time when Maine is poised for growth and increased prosperity.

This morning, we all will explore the vision for this College.

Speaking for the Foundation, we are thrilled to invest in what we see as a multi-faceted, multi-institutional endeavor that features:

1. Combining the synergies of engineering, computing, and information science, to prepare students for the much-needed jobs of today's advancing economy, in fields like artificial intelligence, data visualization, and human-machine interaction.

2. Creating new, world-class teaching and research facilities, expanding course offerings, and growing and advancing our faculty to raise the quality of the program overall.

3. Enabling students to take integrated coursework at all University of Maine System campuses, increasing access to STEM education statewide.

4. Establishing a robust scholarship program to incentivize talented students. This is very important considering pandemic-related drops in applications to the University of Maine System, especially among low-income and first-generation students.

5. Working hand-in-hand and in partnership with more and more industries and businesses, and synchronizing education offerings with their labor force needs.

Together, these efforts will result in more job-ready graduates in STEM sectors poised for growth. They will also accelerate research, innovation, and industries critical to moving Maine's economy forward.

In closing, let me say that with the long-term needs and challenges our state has faced, and the challenges and opportunities of the pandemic converging at this stressful time, there has never been a better moment to launch this new College.

This is a moment to establish the University System as a leader in training students for the jobs of the future. And, with a new partnership growing between the UMaine System and the Roux Institute, an enduring commitment to strengthening STEM education at USM, and a dedication to research excellence at UMaine, this is a time to elevate the research output and stature of the state.

Likewise, there has never been a better time to unify our universities to work together as a whole, just as our nation must now do. To do this, a hallmark value of Harold Alfond is essential. That would be teamwork.

And so, on behalf of the Harold Alfond Foundation, thank you for gathering this morning to build out the vision for this College, thank you for your input, and thank you all for the teamwork and collaborative spirit you have shown and will put to work in the days ahead.

Thank you, everyone. Good luck and have fun today!