



**Remarks of Gregory W. Powell
Chairman, Harold Alfond Foundation
President and CEO, Dexter Enterprises**

Maine State Chamber of Commerce Annual Dinner

**Holiday Inn By the Bay
Portland, Maine**

Thursday, October 28, 2021

Good evening. Thank you, Cliff, for your very kind words and thank you, Dana, for inviting me and Alfond and Flanagan families to join you this evening as we pay tribute to the legacy and lives of two great Mainers.

This Chamber of Commerce represents an impressive 5,000 business owners and employers throughout our state. And the mission and work you do to advance economic growth, opportunity for all, and workforce development could never be more important than it is now.

So, I think I may say, on behalf of the families of both David and Harold, that they are honored and most grateful for this recognition, even as the pain and emotion of David's recent passing remains with us.

Thank you for the important work you do for our state and for honoring these two men.

The lives of Harold Alfond and David Flanagan spanned nearly 170 years, 50 years of which overlapped and were lived in Maine within 20 miles of each other. Oddly, however, while David became a highly valued trustee of Harold's Foundation in 2014, seven years after Harold's death, the two men met only once in those 50 years. The year was 2003.

It speaks volumes about the character and caring of the two men that the place of their meeting was the Children's Center in Augusta – a place where therapy, counseling, and pre-school education is lovingly provided to children with special needs along with support for their families.

Like so many things in life, this meeting may never have occurred were it not for a twist of fate: the 2002 sale of the Boston Red Sox.

For over 20 years, Harold Alfond, his family, and including his great partner, Peter Lunder – who is sitting right over here in this room, so he’ll remember this story – were owners of the Sox. In 2002, Harold and Peter were joining with the Yawkey Trust to sell their interest.

As part of that sale, Harold, Peter, and their family proposed, and it was agreed, that charitable donations would be made from the sale proceeds to charities chosen by the minority partners.

As a seller and minority partner, Harold came to the Children’s Center, which needed funds to expand, to see for himself the wonderful work it did for children with special needs and their families. He was invited by two passionate and long-time Center supporters: David and Kaye Flanagan.

While, as I say, Harold and David had never met, Harold had heard of David and David had heard of Harold. As Harold and I drove from Belgrade to Augusta for the visit, Harold, who was never very good at names, referred to David as “the Big Boss,” the man who had led the restoration of power in the ice storm of 1998.

The leader of CMP whose house was the last in Kennebec County to get back its electricity.

So, on a spring day in 2003, Harold and David met at the Children’s Center for the first and only time. And on that visit, surrounded by little children and their caregivers, Harold, David, and Kaye immediately understood their common ground: that they shared the same love for the people of Maine, especially our children.

And that there is nothing in life as wonderful and satisfying as helping people in need.

And so, Red Sox sale proceeds were used to help fund the Center’s expansion. That was 2003. Today, another expansion is needed.

This July, at David’s last meeting as a trustee of the Harold Alfond Foundation, a \$1 million dollar donation was awarded to the Center in tribute to David and Kaye.

In this day and age of discord and divisiveness across our country, we can be tempted to believe that our differences are overwhelming, that they have overcome our common humanity.

Harold Alfond and David Flanagan showed us that it doesn’t have to be that way – even though, truth be told, in many ways they could not have been more different.

- In his youth, David was a good student and went on to college and then graduate school. In his youth, Harold preferred playing cards over studying, never went to college, ignored scholarships, and instead went to work in a Maine shoe factory.
- David was a lawyer. Harold was not fond of lawyers.
- David had diverse careers in politics, law, business, academia, and served on some 20 different commissions and boards. Harold's career was focused on making shoes – millions and millions of shoes.
- David was a man of letters, a good writer, an articulate speaker. Harold spoke in brief sentences, often oblique.
- David loved piecing together model ships, scores of them. Harold loved athletics.
- David was a Democrat, most of the time. Harold was a Republican all of the time, but gave money to both parties – often to opponents in the same race!

As seemingly different as these two men were, they shared two fundamental passions: they loved to give, and they loved to get things done.

They both shared a life-long commitment to giving, be it commerce, public service, or philanthropy. They gave for the good of their neighbors, their towns, their state, and especially for those least advantaged – the little guy, they would say.

And getting things done was their forte.

The things that needed to be done – whether it was restoring power to 700,000 Maine customers, or manufacturing millions of shoes, or helping to build out a school for children with special needs – they would tackle and get them done no matter how difficult.

And that is the legacy they left us and the essence of what we must do for our state and communities in the days ahead.

As we emerge from the pandemic, through the lens of commerce we can see there are three dynamics of our global economy which pose extraordinary economic uncertainty and challenges: the uncharted territory of fiscal and monetary policy is one; the surging socio-economic and political need to address income and wealth inequality is another; and then there is China.

The complexity of how to harness and navigate these global dynamics and address the challenges they present are daunting and beyond my pay grade. But two things are clear.

One, addressing these challenges for the good of our nation and state, will require strong economic growth – a mission central to the work of this Chamber. And, two, economic growth requires an educated, modernized, and skilled workforce prepared for today’s global market.

Here in Maine, workforce development poses especially acute challenges, both old and new.

No one knows better than you all here in this room that finding workers for the jobs we need filled is an enormous challenge, and that Maine’s skills gap and aging population are threatening our recovery.

That said, as we gather this evening, despite these challenges, there is great opportunity in Maine and important signs that we are on the road to a brighter and more prosperous future.

We are on this road in Maine because we are collaboratively building opportunity for all our people at a transformative moment in our state’s history.

Consider these facts:

- We are on the cusp of defeating a pandemic that has ravaged segments of our labor force and widened economic disparities. But the pandemic, with all its misery, has made the health and beauty of Maine ever more obvious, ever more attractive as a place to live and work, as the lure of urban, densely populated states has waned.
- More people with needed skills are moving to our state as remote work has been proven to work.
- New, small, and growing businesses are emerging in sectors of our economy where we can compete globally – especially in agriculture and aquaculture. And new exciting opportunities are growing for businesses in the tech sectors, including biopharma, as the need to bring many industries home to the United States has become evident.
- A well-formed plan for recovery is in place thanks to Governor Mills, her commission, and our legislature. And an enormous influx of Covid recovery dollars has been allocated to help our workforce rebound.
- Our higher education institutions are stepping up big time with innovative curriculum designed to equip our workforce with skills in healthcare, engineering, computational science, and AI that are needed by business to compete at home and abroad. And our higher ed partners are doing so with hands-on experiential learning programs and projects developed by listening to employers and partnering with them.

- Our Community College system is rapidly growing new, short-term, job-relevant training programs for under-employed and un-employed Mainers. Some 80 Maine employers and trade associations representing over 100,000 Maine workers have already signed MOUs with the Community College System to partner in the development of stackable credential programs and then to hire their graduates.
- And today, our state leads the nation in aspirations and savings for the future education of our children. Over 126,000 Maine children have now received the Alford Foundation's \$500 grant for higher education. These grants and the savings of Maine families now total over \$325 million dollars.

All of this is only a sketch of what we face at this moment and of the progress, momentum, and investment being made in response.

If Harold Alford and David Flanagan were with us this evening, they would be looking at this moment in time, and they would see opportunity – opportunity to give and to get things done. They would call us to action.

Action building on the momentum of this moment can take many forms. Here are three:

- If you need to recruit employees or modernize the skills of the employees you have, contact your community college and work with them to build the workforce you need.
- Make sure all your employees are saving for their children's higher education in Maine's NextGen 529 Savings Program. Put in place automatic payroll deductions and match them if you can.
- Give to the Children's Center.

So, let me close with this reflection on the lives and legacy of Harold Alford and David Flanagan.

Privileged as I was to know each man, idolize them, and be enriched by their friendship, I treasured the talks I had with each in their final days. Harold looking out on Great Pond 14 years ago. David, comforted by the sound of Cobbosseecontee Stream just weeks ago.

“What are the greatest gifts in this life?” we pondered.

As different as each man was, each man agreed. There are two great gifts in life: time and what we make of it.

Harold Alfond and David Flanagan, as different as they were, would want us to seize the opportunity before us.

They would want us to give of ourselves and get things done in this, our time, to build on their legacy and make our state and nation a better place.