

Benoit faces Senate challenge from Goodall

By Alex Lear (published: September 25, 2008)

BATH – Seeking her second term representing state Senate District 19, Sen. Paula Benoit, R-Phippsburg, faces a challenge from Democrat Seth Goodall, an attorney who is chairman of the Richmond Board of Selectmen.

Both candidates agree that the beverage tax on beer, wine and soda should be repealed. While they both support the concept of school reorganization, Goodall and Benoit also said the implementation of that district-shrinking program leaves much to be desired.

District 19 includes Sagadahoc County and the Lincoln County town of Dresden.

Paula Benoit

Benoit, 53, is married with three adult children and until recently owned the Magnolia and Baby Magnolia stores in Bath. Prior to that 10-year venture she co-owned a hairdressing business with her husband.

"It's important for me to go back and use the knowledge that I've gained in (the last two years) to be able to finish some of the work that I've started, (and) give (taxpayers) their money's worth," Benoit said.

She said she views the impending 2011 closure of BNAS as an opportunity, and that she would like to see businesses introduced to the air base property that will produce good-paying jobs.

Benoit said she did not vote for the beverage tax – which is intended to help fund the state's Dirigo Health program – and she favors its repeal via Question 1 on the Nov. 4 ballot.

"Every minute that we spend with Dirigo as our form of state health care, I think that we do not have conversation about what to do with health-care issues, and that's too bad because we all suffer," she said. "We need to have some serious reform, and in my opinion we are not going to have economic development really boom here until we get that straightened out."

She added that "to increase a tax, to cover something that is a failing system – a business person would never, ever say that that's a successful plan."

Funding going into the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program has been a big step toward helping those struggling with rising heating prices, but funding weatherization is even more crucial, Benoit said.

"It does not make sense to be just giving people fuel, and then having it be used up in the first month because the house is not insulated or it is not energy efficient," Benoit said. "That's just pouring money into a black hole."

She said state taxes on income, business and property create barriers to economic progress, discouraging well-to-do business and company owners from moving their lives and ventures to Maine and spending their money here.

Reflecting on the statewide school reorganization initiative, Benoit said the intent was to consolidate the top levels – administration, transportation and food services – and keep the schools intact.

"I think it had good intentions," she said, also adding that "I think it was very fast, it was not thought-out, and I think people were not informed."

She should continue as senator, she said, "because I am fair. I'm open-minded. I'm a very

hard worker. I have very good common sense. I do not go to Augusta and think in terms of Democrat and Republican. I go and I think in terms of 'what can we do to make people as independent as possible so that they can be well, and get free of that dependency on the government.'"

Seth Goodall

Goodall, 30, was recently married and practices law with McCloskey, Mina, Cunniff & Dilworth. While in his teens, he and his brother co-founded Goodall Landscaping, which is now based in Topsham, and recently Goodall served as legal counsel to Senate President Beth Edmonds.

He was elected to the Richmond Board of Selectmen last year, where he said the town followed a voter-approved economic development plan, obtaining more than \$1 million in grants, lowering taxes and attracting Hodgdon Yachts, which created between 60 and 70 jobs.

Goodall said he would like to see that kind of action occur at the state level.

"A lot needs to happen in Maine," Goodall said. "We have great opportunities that we aren't taking advantage of."

The state needs to take bold steps forward, he said, particularly in job creation and the economy.

"We have so many assets here, natural resources," Goodall said – water and forests, for example, that can be utilized to strengthen the state.

He pointed out that the redevelopment of BNAS could create green energy opportunities, suggesting that the site could serve as an incubator for natural resource energy production.

Goodall said that now is not the right time for the beverage tax. Taxes are too high, and this tax is not the ideal funding source for expanding health insurance in Maine, he added.

"However, we must provide coverage for the uninsured and under-insured," Goodall said. "We need to improve Dirigo Health with a funding mechanism that covers more individuals and families. Market reforms have not worked in Maine or across the country. Everyone needs to have access to health insurance, and the state must play a significant role in providing that coverage."

Goodall said that on his first day in the Senate, if elected, he will sponsor legislation to provide extra funding for LIHEAP, and to expand the program to families just above the current threshold for qualification. He would also like to create and expand grants and tax incentives for homeowners and businesses to boost their energy efficiency.

The candidate pointed out that Maine has an issue with both taxes and low wages. "We must transform our economy so that we significantly increase jobs that pay higher wages and offer health insurance and benefits," he said. "We can do this through investments in education and emerging technologies in fields such as the sustainable use of our natural resources and 'green' jobs."

While school reorganization was a good idea in terms of finding efficiencies in government operation, the roll-out was poor, Goodall said: "A one-size-fits-all model does not typically work in Maine."

He pointed out that his district, Regional School Unit 2, focused on improving education first and saving money second.

"We knew if we focused solely on saving money we would jeopardize our children's education, trust between communities, and threaten our local schools," Goodall said. "Money will be saved because we are eliminating administrative overhead once the new RSU goes into effect."

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