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123rd Maine State Legislature
House of Representatives
Second Regular and First Special Sessions
2008 Legislative Review

Representative Meredith Strang Burgess

District 108

Proudly serving Chebeague Island, Cumberland, Long Island and North Yarmouth

2008 Legislative Review

Courtesy of State Representative Meredith Strang Burgess



Rep. Strang Burgess in the House Chamber.



Meredith Strang Burgess, of Cumberland, is serving her first term in the Maine House of Representatives. She represents District 108, which includes the communities of Chebeague Island, Cumberland, Long Island and part of North Yarmouth.

Rep. Strang Burgess serves on the Legislature's Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. She was a member of the Commission To Develop a Strategic Priorities Plan for Maine's Young Children.

Rep. Strang Burgess is a graduate of the University of Maine. She is the founder and owner of an advertising and marketing business in Portland. A breast cancer survivor, Meredith is a cancer activist for early detection and past president of the Maine Cancer Foundation. She is also the past chair of the Board of Visitors for the University of Maine. She has three active sons and a fiancé, Doug Stewart.

Dear Friends and Neighbors:

The 123rd Maine Legislature adjourned on Friday, April 18. Inside you will find details of some of the measures addressed this past session that may be of interest to you.

Earlier in the year, the Legislature passed a supplemental budget that closed a \$190 million budget shortfall. I was pleased that my colleagues and I insisted on one that did not include broad-based tax increases, even though some lawmakers wanted a sales tax increase. Unfortunately, a bill to fund the controversial Dirigo Health program will raise taxes on beer, wine and soda, as well as levy a surcharge on health insurance claims. I did not support this measure (LD 2247, House Roll Call #423).

School consolidation sparked much debate as the Education Committee and Legislature struggled to fix last year's law. The new changes include removing some of the financial obstacles and allowing the Commissioner of Education more flexibility in approving reorganization plans. Locally, I am looking forward to the new and exciting opportunities school consolidation presents to our area.

The Legislature also enacted a jail consolidation compromise that will overhaul the county and state correctional systems and create an oversight board that will manage and coordinate operations.

Due to pressure from the federal Department of Homeland Security, the Legislature revised its standards for issuing state driver's licenses and identification cards. Two bills were passed that will require an applicant to be a resident of Maine and be in the United States legally in order to obtain state credentials.

Please contact me if you have any questions about the items in this mailer. As always, it has been an honor and privilege to serve as your State Representative.

Sincerely,

Meredith Strang Burgess

Rep. Meredith Strang Burgess
Working to bring common sense and the voice
of small business to Augusta

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MEREDITH STRANG BURGESS

Highlights of bills debated and enacted in 2008

Transportation and Driver's Licenses

The 123rd Legislature passed two bills that will put Maine into compliance with Department of Homeland Security demands to tighten state driver's license security. One will require that an applicant for a license or non-driver identification card show valid evidence of legal presence in the United States and require that a legal non-resident's license must expire when the person's visa expires.

A second law requires a person renewing a driver's license or applying for the first time to show proof of state residency. Acceptable documents include a recent Maine driver's license with a physical address, tax return, W-2 form, paycheck stub, utility bill, college ID or school transcript. Prior to this law, there were no residency requirements to receive a Maine driver's license.

Maine's bridges will be made safer as the Legislature approved bonding \$160 million to repair some of the 288 bridges that will need work in the coming years. To help pay for these loans, various title, registration and vanity plate fees will increase beginning September 1, 2008.



Rep. Strang Burgess with her son Andrew and Speaker Glenn Cummings.

Labor

The minimum wage will increase to \$7.25 per hour starting October 1, 2008. A year later it will increase again to \$7.50 per hour.

A person can now take family medical leave to care for a sibling with a serious health condition if the siblings are responsible for each other's common welfare through joint living or financial arrangements.

Public Health and Safety

In an effort to protect children from the dangers of second-hand smoke, legislators passed a law which takes effect on September 1, 2008 prohibiting a person from smoking in a vehicle if a child under the age of 16 is present. A police officer may only issue a warning to a person caught violating this provision for the first year. Beginning September 1, 2009, a person may receive a \$50 fine.

The sale of novelty lighters, those that appear to be a toy, feature a flashing light or make musical sounds, is now banned.

All health insurance policies must cover colorectal cancer screenings recommended by a health care provider for people over the age of 50 or, if younger than 50, are at a high risk for colorectal cancer. This applies to all policies issued or renewed on or after January 1, 2009.

Toxic chemicals in children's toys will receive closer monitoring and the sale of children's products with unsafe levels of lead is banned.

Consumer Protection

A number of changes were made to Maine's consumer protection laws this past year.

The practice of "slamming," or changing a consumer's telephone service without express authorization, is outlawed. Maine homeowners have new protections from predatory lenders. Customers will be able to request cash refunds on gift card balances of \$5 or less beginning November 1.

Towns with over 2,000 residents will soon have to adopt the Maine Uniform Building and Energy Code. Towns that have adopted any building code by August 1, 2008 must enforce the new code by July 1, 2010. Towns that have no building code must adopt the Uniform Code by July 1, 2012.



Rep. Strang Burgess speaks at an event in Augusta.

The Outdoors

The Snowmobile Trail Fund will receive extra funding for trail maintenance. To help pay for this, snowmobile registration fees for residents will increase from \$33 to \$35 and nonresident seasonal registration fees will increase from \$68 to \$88.

In an effort to preserve Maine's tradition of hunting and other outdoor activities, a new law ensures that the total number of acres of public land open to hunting cannot fall below the acreage open to hunting on January 1, 2008.

The Legislature adopted changes to Maine's super pack license to allow for more equity in the distribution of antlerless deer permits. It limits the three deer that may be taken with a super pack license during the special archery season to antlerless deer only. Also, landowners who allow hunting on their lands must receive at least 25% of the antlerless deer permits issued for a wildlife management district.

Breast Cancer Awareness Plate

As a breast cancer survivor, a personal passion of Rep. Strang Burgess is raising awareness of breast cancer. During the 123rd Legislature, she sponsored and successfully guided to passage a bill to establish a breast cancer awareness license plate.

The new specialty license plate can be purchased beginning October 1, 2008 and the proceeds will go to support various breast cancer services and programs in Maine. The plates will cost \$20 in addition to the regular motor vehicle registration fee, with annual renewals costing \$15. With each new plate purchased, \$9 will go to breast cancer support groups and another \$9 will be donated for each annual renewal.



Rep. Strang Burgess shows off the original "Pink Plate" license plate design with Secretary of State Matthew Dunlap and Senator Dennis Damon.

To receive periodic legislative updates, please e-mail me at RepMeredith.StrangBurgess@legislature.maine.gov.