



# **Michael Brennan for Congress**

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## **Expanding Access to Education**

*"Education is not an abstract political issue to me – it changed my life. The single most important opportunity in my life that allowed me to get to where I am today was the opportunity to attend college. I worked summers in construction, and full-time jobs throughout the school year, in order to pay my way through college."*

### **The Key to a Strong System: Strong Teachers**

Our education system will succeed only if we have strong, committed teachers. A commitment to achieving this system means a commitment to our teachers, and to give this profession the honor and support it deserves. I come from a long line of teachers. I am proud to say that my aunt was chosen as Maine's Teacher of the Year in 1968. We need as a community to support teachers in their pursuit of professional development, and to enable more committed individuals to access the education needed to be able to enter the teaching profession. I want to be a champion for teachers in Washington – to champion the needs of teachers as a way to champion the needs of their students.

### **A Commitment To Expanding Opportunity**

I am grateful to have had the chance to serve eight years on the Education Committee in the Maine legislature, for two years as its chair. As a member of the committee I worked to create Maine's community college system, so that Mainers can now receive an Associate's degree from our affordable local community college that is transferable to the university system. I helped to rewrite the school funding formula and increase state aid to education, and to rework the school construction program, enabling many Maine communities to build new schools. I am particularly proud of the bill I introduced which made Maine the third state in the country to provide a tuition waiver to youth in foster care. In one year, we nearly doubled the number of foster youth in Maine's colleges.

On the national level, there is still much to do. In the short-term, we need to strengthen Pell Grants to help them keep pace with the rising cost of college tuition, and continue to cut interest rates on student loans. But I also believe we should look at bolder steps – like a significant federal block grant program to allow states to increase access to higher education. In Georgia, the HOPE Scholarship program provides a scholarship at any public university to qualifying students from state high schools, and has granted more than \$3 billion to more than 900,000 students over the last dozen years. Fulfilling our promise to the next generation means enabling every state to develop a program of this kind.

### **Education Throughout Life**

In our fast-paced global economy, it is going to be critical for workers to continue to educate themselves through life, and to constantly reinvent themselves to keep up. This means education should not end with college, and that our commitment to providing educational opportunity should not be confined to youth. We need to develop an education system which people can move in and out of with flexibility. We need to make a real commitment to workforce training programs – a responsibility that government and business can share.

On the Education Committee, I leveraged the funding to create Maine's Senior College, which is now home to the national OSHER Institute for Lifelong Learning. I am committed to pursuing creative ways to support education and training opportunities for workers to develop new skills and be able to compete in our economy.

The promise of a better future for all Mainers and Americans depends on providing the opportunity of a college education for everyone who is willing to work for it – and laying the groundwork through a quality K-12 education system so that they can get there. Education is not only essential to the American dream – it is also an essential element to developing good and responsible citizens in a democracy.