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“Excellence is an art won by training and habituation. We do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have those because we have acted rightly. We are what we repeatedly do.

Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit.”

- Aristotle, Philosopher

The Maine Center for Career Preparation is a private, non-profit committed to improving the economic prospects of Maine citizens by improving the linkages between education and workforce development.

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# Education Works!

## Maine’s Budget- Weathering the Storm

By Tom Broussard

The imploding state budget will affect the state from many perspectives not the least of which will be **employment...**

...or rather **unemployment.**

However the state budget crisis is resolved, ensuing layoffs are likely to trigger a wave of unemployment particularly for relatively well paid people such as municipal employees, state employees, teachers, support staff, etc. The gradually rising unemployment we have observed recently will certainly get a big boost and in this case, a boost is not a good thing.

Additionally, those that are currently unemployed may be categorized (fairly or unfairly) as “harder to employ” than the municipal and state workers who will be losing their jobs. As a result, those in the former category will find themselves competing directly with those in the latter.

These budget-induced layoffs are likely to be better qualified, better educated and more mobile--affording them more employment choices.

These choices range from:

retirement (upwards of 40% of state and municipal workers

and teachers are reportedly 50 years old or older);

accepting lower paying jobs (for which

they may be overqualified but which they prefer to leaving Maine);

moving (either further south or out of state) because they need the income and they are able to make the move. These highly qualified workers can neither retire nor live on below average wages.

As an interesting aside, a recent news report detailed the phenomena of new college grads finding themselves competing for jobs with their own alumni in their schools' career centers.



### Retirement

A large number of retirements have been predicted for some time based on the advancing age of the baby-boomers. While no real solutions have been proposed to date the thinking has been that we have some time to work on it. The budget debacle could trigger the much anticipated retirement tidal wave sooner rather than later.

### Underemployment

If some large number of relatively highly qualified workers accept employment at lower than desirable wages (yet still preferable to relocation) this exacerbates the already existing problem of *underemployment*. Those workers now join the existing pool of underemployed workers.

This exerts downward pressure on those already unemployed who find the competition for those same jobs (jobs to which they may have aspired) taken by those more qualified who are in a position to accept as *less* what the unemployed person viewed as *more*. The downward pressure on wages cannot be denied as well.

### Out-migration

Finally, if some large percentage of these relatively highly qualified workers choose to leave the state, this

will accelerate the "brain drain" and exacerbate the already poor mix of low educational achievement levels in Maine.



Is there one simple solution? No, of course not. Virtually every state in the US is dealing with similar budget issues driven by similar (and similarly intractable) macro-economic forces. We are clearly in the position of choosing from among lesser evils not greater goods.

The real danger when dealing with issues of this magnitude is that it knocks the wind out of *everyone's* sails.

This kind of crisis tends to overwhelm the delicate mechanisms of innovation and creativity just when those characteristics are needed most. With nary a breeze, no one can be faulted for looking after their own survival first. There is precious little interest left for new ideas when the ship is taking on water.

But even while fixing the leaks, the ship must still sail on. Education and workforce development provide the wind in our sails.

A ship afloat but becalmed isn't a ship—it's a barge. "The good news is we plugged the holes. *The bad news is we used the sails to do it.*"

After we weather this storm it will be even clearer that the only real assets we have are our people. Education and workforce development in particular are lengthy endeavors whose beginnings cannot be postponed...and they don't have to be.

It is the first step and often a very small step in every journey that is the most difficult, no matter how great the distance.

Education and personal development occur over lifetimes. But they start the same way—with the first step.

The budget crisis cannot be allowed to distract us so much that we put off starting the trip.

Those that have the responsibility to bail *should* bail.

The rest of us should be mending our sails. The breeze will pick up again and when it does, we must be ready.