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**From:** "Eric Leys" <eric@ericleys.com>  
**To:**  
**Date:** 4/8/2009 11:47 AM  
**Subject:** Message from Eric Leys

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Good morning Maine 207 ally,

As I am sure you are aware, voters across Maine Township went to the polls today to elect four of the seven seats for the District 207 Board of Education. While I wanted to share a bit of my perspective with you no matter the outcome of the election, I am pleased that voters have elected me to a third term of service on the Board of Education. It is an honor to serve on the board of education. I care very deeply for Maine 207, and am committed to making decisions as a board member that will secure a strong future for our school district. I also wish to congratulate Ed Mueller who will be joining me for another term on the board as well as Margaret McGrath and Eldon Burk, who expressed broad support for past board action and for school district programs and initiatives during the course of the campaign.

In writing you today, I would like to comment about my interaction as a board member with teachers—and the MTA leadership to the entire Maine 207 team.

I was shocked just a couple weeks ago when the MTA brought to an end eight years of efforts on my part to reach out to them, include them in the decision making process, assign value to their input, and cultivate a relationship based on the pursuit of shared interests. When our teachers union endorses school board candidates, they make an entirely different statement when they choose to not endorse an incumbent board member versus a challenger. To fairly represent the gravity of their posture this cycle, please know that this is the most active the MTA has been in at least two decades in trying to influence the outcome of a school board race. One wonders what their motives are in bringing a message to community members that Eric Leys is not worthy of their endorsement—in fact, that the board would be better off without my having volunteered my time to promote student achievement and sound management of district resources over these past eight years.

Had I not been a product of our district, a Maine West graduate, and knew first-hand about the quality of our instructional staff both through my time as a student and my even longer service as a school board member, I could possibly err in believing that this endorsement represented the feelings of many, or most, individual teachers—but I know that is not true.

Now that the election is over, I extend an olive branch. Not to the MTA—because I've done that for the past eight years. I extend an olive branch to individual teachers across District 207. Voters have granted me another term of office; and from now on, your relationship will be directly with me, without the filter of the MTA. We will have open communication and work together on the many important projects, ideas, and initiatives facing our district.

I extend my hand in partnership—not to the 3 or 4 members of MTA endorsement committee that said: "We're too small for your big ideas" but rather to the teachers that care not for bitterness or pure self interest but desire to truly make an impact in the education—and by extension the lives—of students. The teachers I had as a student at Maine West—the teachers that I know are leading classrooms throughout the district today out of commitment to providing students with a strong educational foundation—these are who constitute the vast but often quiet majority of teachers in Maine. The teachers who, when for example an 18-year old senior says he might run for the school board, encourage him. The teachers who would tell that 18-year old student that if he works hard and puts his mind to it, he can make a difference.

Had I not had that encouragement, I may not have run for school board for the first time in 2001—less than

three years after graduating from Maine West. I believe in that orientation—that mindset, that one can never be too small for big ideas—is more typical of our teachers in Maine than what I observed in this “candidate endorsement process”. I know there are countless instances where Maine teachers truly make a profound difference in the lives of our students.

As for that educator I referenced a moment ago, I was honored to thank him personally, in front of thousands, just a year or two ago. Less than a decade after I received my Maine diploma, I was board president of a school district I love very dearly. And because this teacher said “why not” to me, rather than “don’t bother”, I believe I have built a leadership legacy at Maine that will stand for many years after my service on the board comes to an end. But there’s still more I’d like to do. I am grateful to the voters of our school district for serving as the final arbiter and endorsing my past service to the school district, as well as my ideas for the future. **As a member of the Maine 207 team, I will need your support more than ever now as we work together to assure a bright future for our school district in challenging times.**

I am committed to public education. I desire for Maine 207 to get better and better. A constellation of opportunity awaits students as they walk across the stage, receive their diploma and enter an increasingly complex world. It is our responsibility—as board members, teachers, administrators, support staff, parents, taxpayers, and community members—to ensure that our students are prepared to compete for success in this complex world.

I will end with a final note to the union endorsement committee: Never forget that teaching, learning, and education is about propping people up—not putting them down. I know the vast but quiet majority of your members already know that. Now that the election has come and gone, I can’t wait work together as we all strive to improve learning in Maine 207.

With Regards,

Eric Leys  
Member, District 207 Board of Education