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National Institute for Civil Discourse Launches Maine Civility Initiative

Working with the Maine Development Foundation and the League of Women Voters, NICD is leading initiative to revive civility in Maine and three other states

October 6, 2017 — The National Institute for Civil Discourse (NICD) on Friday kicked off its grassroots civility initiative in Maine – part of a nationwide plan to proactively engage 100,000 citizens to learn the skills to improve public and political discourse.

Over the next year, civility experts from the nonpartisan NICD will work with partner organizations including the Maine Development Foundation and the League of Women Voters of Maine to engage that state’s citizens on the importance of civility. NICD has set a target of hosting 400 conversations on building civility, with a goal of engaging 100,000 people in Arizona, Iowa, Maine and Ohio.

The Maine initiative will be chaired by former Portland Mayor Pamela Plumb and Aroostook County Administrator Ryan Pelletier.

“In this age of increasing polarization, it’s time for every American to relearn the importance of being able to disagree without being disagreeable,” said Dr. Carolyn J. Lukensmeyer, Executive Director of the National Institute for Civil Discourse. “Our democracy depends on our ability to peaceably debate our differences and find common ground to address challenges our communities face. We’re proud to be working with the League of Women Voters and the Maine Development Foundation to build a civility revival in Maine that makes waves across the country.”

The initiative will benefit from the influence and organizational ability of both the Maine Development Foundation, which works to foster sustainable economic growth across the state, and the League of Women Voters of Maine, with chapters across the state that advocate to improve government at all levels and engage citizens to better understand the decisions that impact their lives.

“Making democracy work means actively pushing back on the increasingly corrosive political rhetoric that we see at every level,” said Jill Ward, President of the League of Women Voters of Maine. “Our partnership with the Maine Development Foundation and the National Institute for Civil Discourse seeks to restore civil, respectful, informed discourse so that every Maine citizen can participate in our political system. We all deserve a voice in our government and the League is excited to help lead this important work in Maine.”

“At a time when our country seems to be growing more divided, restoring civility is an important ingredient to strengthen our communities and grow our economy,” said Yellow Light Breen, President & CEO, Maine Development Foundation. “Solving tough, long-term and maintaining sustainable economic growth requires building consensus and working together over the long haul. Working with the National Institute for Civil Discourse and the League of Women Voters, we look forward to engaging Maine citizens from across the political spectrum to build relationships, find common ground, and strengthen the foundation for our leaders to collaborate to tackle problems impacting our great state.”

The announcement follows a volatile stretch of incivility, punctuated by the deaths of Heather Heyer and two police officers along with the 34 individuals injured during rioting in Charlottesville. Other higher profile incidents earlier this year include the tragic shooting of Congressman Steve Scalise and four others in Alexandria, Virginia; shoving between lawmakers on the floor of the Texas Legislature; and Montana Congressman Greg Gianforte assaulting a reporter over a question. In June, Weber Shandwick’s annual *Civility in America* poll found that 75 percent of Americans report that incivility has risen to “crisis” levels.

National civility expert Dr. Lukensmeyer announced the initiative launch while participating in a discussion at the University of Southern Maine that was headlined by Mayor Plumb and Administrator Pelletier. University of Southern Maine President Glenn Cummings, who also has served as Speaker of the Maine House of Representatives, gave a welcoming address and *Portland Press Herald* Editorial Page Editor Greg Kesich moderated the discussion.

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About the National Institute for Civil Discourse

The [National Institute for Civil Discourse](#), is a non-profit, non-partisan institute based at the University of Arizona dedicated to addressing incivility and political dysfunction in American democracy by promoting structural and behavioral change. Informed by research, NICD’s programs are designed to create opportunities for elected officials, the media, and the public to engage different voices respectfully and take responsibility for the quality of our public discourse and effectiveness of our democratic institutions. Their National Advisory Board includes former Presidents Bill Clinton and George Herbert Walker Bush; former Senators Tom Daschle and Olympia Snowe; former Secretaries of State Madeline Albright and Colin Powell; former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor; and journalists like Katie Couric, Greta Van Susteren, and NPR’s Scott Simon.