
The Final Word

Troy Jackson
President, Maine Senate

A fifth-generation logger from northern Maine, Troy Jackson (D) served in the state House from 2002 to 2008, when he moved to the Senate. He was chosen by his Senate colleagues to be president in 2018. Jackson is a graduate of the University of Maine at Fort Kent.

How has the coronavirus affected the legislature's ability to work?

We decided to temporarily suspend the legislature until the pandemic has subsided. Before we went home, we worked quickly to pass a bipartisan budget that included funding for public health nursing, the Maine CDC and more. We've launched www.troyjackson.org/covid19 and a weekly video series called the "Dirigo Network: Celebrating Mainers Helping Mainers." COVID-19 has definitely posed many challenges to the way our state operates, but we are simply finding new ways to keep things going. *[Note: Watch Jackson's first Dirigo video.]*

What leadership lessons have you learned from government reactions to the virus?

We've seen how COVID-19 has devastated other cities and states. As leaders, we had a responsibility to take this pandemic seriously and do everything we could to make sure what happened in those states didn't happen here. The other key takeaway is that we have to take care of people affected by COVID-19. The only way we're going to get through this is by working together. It's why my colleagues and I worked hard to expand unemployment benefits and urged Congress to help small-business owners and self-employed Mainers. As someone who has relied on unemployment in the past and who has gone without health insurance for long periods, I know what it feels like to wonder how you are going to make ends meet in the face of uncertainty. I believe the states that take care of working families and small businesses will be better off in the long run.

What motivated you to run for office?

For me it was about labor issues in logging that prompted me to get into it back in '98. I got so frustrated that we ended up



blocking the Canadian border for a week [to protest landowners hiring Canadian loggers instead of Mainers]. All these politicians showed up because it was just before an election. When the election went away, we were nothing to them. That was a really big eye-opener. So what motivated me was anger. At 29 years old, I finally understood that laws are great, but if people don't enforce them, they don't mean anything.

How has coming from a rural area influenced your approach to public service?

I'm the farthest legislator from Augusta, so it's rare that I have constituents who come to testify and see the process. I try and keep that first and foremost in mind—that there's a different belief out there than what I'm probably hearing 24/7 in the Capitol building. I didn't feel like I had a voice, and even though I'm the Senate president, I often still feel like I'm being left behind. And if I feel like that, then God bless all the people I represent who don't have as much of an ability to make change.

Who was your biggest role model?

Obviously, my parents were. I didn't have anyone politically, that's for sure.

What would surprise most people to learn about you?

Maybe that I'm still an active logger. My youngest son is the sixth generation. I'm a member of both the machinists and painters unions. I wear a union pin every day I'm in the legislature.

What final words would you like to share?

There are a lot of people in this country who feel very much left behind and they don't really know where their place is. It's important as legislators to not forget about them. They're out there and they matter. I'm living proof of that. It probably would have been a lot more financially beneficial for me to just shut my mouth. But I didn't want to live like that anymore.

Beth Hladick conducted this interview, which has been edited for length and clarity.