

# MAINE BEHIND THE NUMBERS

The facts on the economic track record of Maine governors Paul LePage and Janet Mills



## JOBS

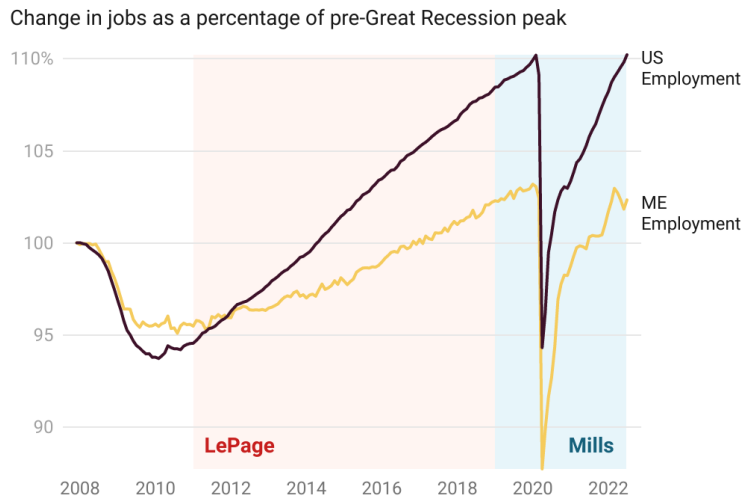
### LePage

- Tried to block voter-approved minimum wage increase for 1 in 3 workers
- Laid off 1,800 state workers and slashed pensions for retirees
- Forfeited 4,000 jobs by refusing to expand Medicaid
- Cut supports for out-of-work Mainers
- Recession job recovery took 9 years, among the slowest in the nation

### Mills

- Recovered 99% of jobs lost during the pandemic in just two years
- Directed \$2.25 billion in federal funds to boost economy and launch sweeping Maine Jobs & Recovery Plan
- Raised pay for teachers and care workers, and boosted pensions for public servants
- Enacted first-in-the-nation paid leave law that benefits 85% of Maine workers
- High rate of in-migration and the only state to grow younger in 2021

***It took Maine almost nine years to recover the jobs lost during the Great Recession — the forty-ninth slowest recovery in the nation***



Learn more: [bit.ly/jobsMBTN](https://bit.ly/jobsMBTN)

Source: MECEP Action analysis of Current Employment Statistics survey data • Created with Datawrapper

**[MaineBehindTheNumbers.org](https://MaineBehindTheNumbers.org) — a project of MECEP Action**

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Paul LePage photo by Gage Skidmore



## Suppressing wages and job growth

Paul LePage responded to the economic hardship caused by the Great Recession with a failed “trickle down” approach that relied on massive job and budget cuts to offset the expense of [tax giveaways](#) to wealthy households. During his tenure, the state lost more than [1,800 public servants](#) to lay offs or positions going unfilled. He also forfeited more than [4,000 jobs](#) by refusing to expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act. Instead of making investments to train, attract, and retain the workforce needed for a modern and resilient economy, LePage attempted to [suppress wages](#) and [undercut younger workers](#). He opposed raising the minimum wage from \$7.50, even after voters demanded the change that ultimately benefitted [one in three](#) Maine workers. He also repeatedly tried to implement a sub-minimum wage for teenagers. LePage’s approach resulted in sluggish job growth that for the first few years of his administration was the [forty-ninth slowest](#) in the nation. It took almost [nine years](#) to recover all the jobs lost in the recession.



## Withholding worker supports

Gutting state services also made it harder for Mainers out of work to get back on their feet. Even as [poverty and hunger](#) among Maine families rose, LePage [denied food assistance](#) to unemployed Mainers, restricted eligibility for federal aid, and then stockpiled [\\$155 million](#) of federal antipoverty aid and improperly diverted some of it to other uses. In 2018, his administration [denied unemployment benefits](#) to untold numbers of Mainers without jobs following the disastrous rollout of a new compensation system, and allegedly [destroyed records](#) to cover it up. The system was so riddled with problems that a recent study found that only [26 percent](#) of Maine workers who lost their jobs received benefit in 2019, a 19 percent drop since 2010.



## Restricting worker power

LePage fought throughout his tenure to make it harder for working people — especially in sectors predominantly staffed by immigrants and women — to collectively bargain for better wages, benefits, and working conditions. While his anti-union “[right to work](#)” bills were considered so anti-worker they failed to pass even when Republicans controlled the legislature, attacks on other essential workers with low wages were more successful and widely damaging. In 2012, LePage stripped workers at the nation’s largest brown egg farm of their hard-won [right to unionize](#). Prior to forming their union, the workers — many of them immigrants — suffered [exploitive and unsafe](#) working conditions. The same year, LePage also revoked the right to unionize for [child care workers](#), which are overwhelmingly represented by women. The action contributed to suppressed wages and job quality in that sector, which continue to impact Maine's economy. Last summer, a poll [found](#) that 85 percent of child care centers in Maine were experiencing a staffing shortage, with low wages overwhelmingly cited as the biggest obstacle.

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## Rebuilding Maine's workforce

When Mills took office, she inherited an [aging, underpaid workforce](#) poorly served by gutted state programs and vulnerable to the public health crisis that struck a year into her term. Prioritizing the concerns of essential workers and small businesses, Mills directed [\\$1.25 billion](#) in federal relief funds into Maine's economy and launched the sweeping [Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan](#) with another [\\$1 billion](#) in federal stimulus aid, addressing the need for [childcare, transportation, workforce development, housing, higher education](#), and [broadband expansion](#). Mills also made it easier for workers to access benefits, training, and jobs by creating a network of specialized [workforce navigators](#) and bolstering [unemployment services](#). While Mills faced criticism throughout her term for [blocking](#) efforts to expand workers' rights to organize, she was also praised for actions that broke ground on paid leave and boosted incomes and pensions. Mills passed the nation's first [paid leave law](#), granting the overwhelming majority of workers the right to up to 40 hours of paid time off each year. In addition to benefitting from the [largest annual wage gain in a decade](#) resulting from the raised minimum wage, Mills also directed additional wage increases to [child care](#) and [direct care](#) workers and [state employees](#). She committed nearly [\\$105 million](#) to the pension fund to help retired public servants (including teachers) keep up with the rising cost of living. Not only has Maine already recovered 99 percent of the jobs lost during the pandemic — [95,000 jobs](#) in just two years — the state is also attracting young working families. Maine currently has the seventh highest rate of net [in-migration](#), and is the only state in the nation that [grew younger](#) in 2021.

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