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For more information please contact:
Gene Lussier
Board Chair, Florida MEP
321-939-4000

Snowe Calls for Full Funding of Manufacturing Assistance Program *Small Business Forum Draws Standing Room Only Crowd*

WASHINGTON, D.C. - In front of a packed house at the Lewiston City Council Building this morning, U.S. Senator Olympia J. Snowe (R-Maine), called for increased federal support of the state's manufacturing industry. Snowe, who serves as Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, was joined by Small Business Administrator Steven Preston today to host an open forum for more than 90 of the state's small manufacturers, small business owners, and representatives from the greater Androscoggin County.

For nearly two hours Snowe led an open dialogue between the audience and United States Small Business Administrator Preston, Roger Kilmer, Director of the Manufacturing Extension Partnership, and Rod Rodrigue, Executive Director of Maine's Manufacturing Partnership about ways in which the SBA and other federal and state programs can better support innovation and investment in Maine's manufactures must undertake to become more competitive against foreign competitors.

"The state of Maine's economy depends on the success of the state's small businesses and small manufactures," Snowe said. "Today's event was informative and productive for everyone involved, and I am especially pleased Administrator Preston was able to hear first hand from Maine's world class manufacturing workforce what they need from the SBA. There is a natural partnership between the SBA, the MEP officials, and Maine's small business owners which lends itself to an open dialogue about the needs of the state's manufactures, and we certainly built on that vital dialogue this morning.

The purpose of today's forum was to explore how the Small Business Administration (SBA) and Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) programs and local services could assist and support the continued development of Maine's small manufacturing community to foster innovation and investment and remain competitive with foreign manufactures.

"As the former Chair of the Senate Small Business Committee and now Ranking Member, fostering the continued growth and development of small businesses and manufactures in the state and throughout the country through federal resources and legislation is my top priority. American manufactures are facing an unprecedented challenge today and we must be committed to making the playing field level for our small businesses affected by global trade," Snowe said.

The percentage of all U.S. workers in the United States working in the manufacturing industry has steadily declined over the last half century, including the loss of more than 20,000 jobs in Maine between 2000 and 2006. Since April of 2005 the MEP has created or maintained more than 1,200 jobs in the state and resulted in over \$50 million in employee pay and benefits. To capitalize on its success, Senator Snowe introduced legislation in the Senate this January that would extend full funding for the MEP for the next five years.

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