

Dear Readers,

This issue's Margaret Chase Smith essayist is a recent graduate of Marshwood High School in Eliot, Maine, and is the winner of this year's statewide Margaret Chase Smith Essay Contest. In her essay, Becca Leathe observes that, today, many young people have chosen to disengage from politics, in large part, because they believe they have little influence over its focus or the outcomes. The result is a self-reinforcing downward spiral that exacerbates the sense among young people that the issues they care about are unimportant to most politicians.

I've been thinking a lot about this issue lately, especially as the election season shifts into high gear. Each year, since 1996, our center, in partnership with the Margaret Chase Smith Library in Skowhegan, has sponsored a project to promote ethical campaigns in Maine. Aimed only at statewide and Congressional candidates, we have elicited the public pledges of each of the candidates to engage in substantive, fair and honest campaigns. However, this year we decided to discontinue the project, in part, because we—like Leathe—have chosen instead to focus on educating students in Maine high schools and at the University of Maine about the importance of ethics in public life.

Sadly, even passage of the Bipartisan Campaign Finance Reform Act in 2002 has not slowed the race to the bottom in our national campaigns for public office. So far, Maine's Congressional campaigns have not followed suit; however, the influx of outside monies and advertisements has yet to begin. An August 21 article in the *Bangor Daily News* reported that the National Republican Congressional Committee has picked Maine's 2nd Congressional District as one of its top targets this year. Moreover, within Maine, an August 23 article of the *Bangor Daily News* noted that 20 state legislators who won their seats under the 1996 Clean Election Act have subsequently accepted special interest money to help other candidates win their seats. Through mid-July, political action committees on both sides of the aisle have raised some \$350,000. (Some pundits would say, "let the horse race begin.")

In the meantime, here at *Maine Policy Review* we present five topics, none of which lend themselves to easy solutions or soundbites: smart growth and regional planning, obesity, Native American sovereignty, genetically modified foods, and fulfilling the courts' mandates of community inclusion for persons with psychiatric and other long-term disabilities. Addressing each of these issues will require ongoing citizen deliberation and processes that enable differences to be aired openly and as early as possible. Solutions will not arise from easy promises of everything for all, but from average and elected citizens making hard choices after careful assessments of potential gains and losses.

So true, our votes this November. Good luck with your decisionmaking and hold on tight to the reigns—the Merry Go Round is about to change its tune.

Best,

