

Dear Readers,

As I write this, Maine is experiencing an unseasonably mild and early spring. Daffodils, crocuses, and forsythia are blooming, college students are out on the mall in shorts playing Frisbee, and some farmers have reportedly begun planting several weeks early. Springs like this make us happy to be living here. Maine is a unique state in many ways, not least of which is our politics. As described by Kenneth Palmer in his article, Maine's paradoxical politics, which often draw national attention, have contributed to Maine's "creative and effective political system."

Maine may be beautiful and unique, but the state and nation face a difficult present and uncertain future with the current severe recession. Articles in this issue cover a number of important challenges and opportunities facing our state. David Vail asks if there is a rural population rebound in the state and whether quality-of-place investments can spur development and in-migration in Maine's rural "rim" counties. Two articles deal with hazards, but of very different sorts. Mary Davis analyzes the costs of environmental toxins on children's health and what can be done to alleviate childhood exposure to such toxins. Laura Brothers and her coauthors discuss the importance of mapping seafloor geohazards so Maine can better develop offshore wind energy and other resources. Looking at the human side of the economy, Sandra Butler and her coauthors show how the Competitive Skills Scholarship Program, administered by the Department of Labor, meets the needs of employers and of low-income and unemployed Mainers by providing education and training to produce a more skilled workforce.

This issue also features three commentaries. Land Use Regulation Commissioner E. Bart Harvey discusses why he believes approval of the landmark concept plan for the Moosehead Lake area was a good decision for the region, for the Plum Creek Company and other landowners, and for the people of Maine. Lauren Sterling, Sheryl Peavey and Michael Burke describe the Educare program that will open in fall 2010 in Waterville, which will join a network of other Educare programs around the country devoted to high-quality, research-based early childhood care and education. Martha Sterling-Golden's commentary opens by asking why the life and story of Margaret Chase Smith still resonates with so many American women from across the political landscape. She raises thought-provoking questions about women in leadership and what could be done to better prepare women to engage in political life. Our Margaret Chase Smith Essay features the three top prize-winning essays by high school students from the 2009 annual Margaret Chase Smith Library essay contest. The contest's theme was tied to a quotation from Margaret Chase Smith not to fear the inevitability of change; contestants were asked to consider what changes the new administration should make, and the American people embrace, to reform American society.

We hope you enjoy this issue and that it stimulates some thoughtful conversation, while you enjoy this gift of an early spring.

Best,

