

REFLECTIONS

Looking at Maine's Recurring Issues

by Linda Silka

Once again, *Maine Policy Review* brings us insightful articles about Maine's pressing concerns. These articles highlight research on critical challenges in Maine: in industries, workforce development, health, and education. Through the authors' in-depth research, these articles highlight the challenges Maine faces. For example, we learn from the article by David Vail, Donna Moreland, and Mike Wilson, "Reshaping Maine Woods Destinations for Twenty-First Century Tourists," about changes in the tourism industry. The article by Gisela Hoecherl-Alden examines postsecondary language education at the University of Maine and asks whether the University of Maine can afford to concede to its regional competitors. And the article by Lauren Jacobs and colleagues examine the interesting topic of weather policies that determine outdoor recess or physical education in Maine's elementary schools, asking, What is too cold? As these articles suggest, recurrent issues in Maine continue to call for research and solutions.

One of the many strengths of *Maine Policy Review* is that it creates an ongoing discussion. *MPR* builds on what is known on key issues in Maine from the past, it describes what is going on now, and it considers how we can shape a brighter future. To make the most of *MPR* articles, it is helpful to look back over past issues and see what topics keep coming up. We can learn much by following the issues that keep appearing in *MPR*. In fact, we've created

a series of topic-specific reading lists on our website that pull together all the articles on the most important policy issues in Maine (<https://mcspolicycenter.umaine.edu/mpr/mpr-reading-lists/>).

Consider health, for example. This current issue includes an article on health by Zachariah Croll and Erika Ziller, "Health Status and Access to Care among Maine's Low-Income Childless Adults." This article is one of many that *MPR* has published on health-related topics. These research and policy articles help us understand questions of who needs what sort of care, what is happening with health care for people of different ages and incomes, and how we pay for health care. Consider just 5 of the 50 or so articles (<https://mcspolicycenter.umaine.edu/mpr/mpr-reading-lists/health-care/>) on health that have appeared in *MPR* since volume 1 in 1992:

- A Public Health View of Environmental Regulation (1992)
- Chronic Disease: The Epidemic of the Twentieth Century (2000)
- Top 10 Health Issues Faced by Maine People (2003)
- Lessons from Health Reform (2013)
- Improving the Health of Communities through Population Health Assessments (2018)

Or consider the issue of workforce development. In this issue, Joseph McDonnell writes about impending changes to Maine's workforce due to

artificial intelligence: "Maine's Workforce Challenges in the Age of Artificial Intelligence." *MPR* has published close to 25 other articles on Maine's workforce over the years (<https://mcspolicycenter.umaine.edu/mpr/mpr-reading-lists/workforce/>). Here is a sample of them:

- Workers and Jobs: The Balance is Shifting (1998)
- Learning and Earning in Vacationland: Promoting Education and Economic Opportunity in Maine (2002)
- Workforce Investment in Maine's New Energy Economy (2008)
- Do We Have the Workforce Skills for Maine's Innovation Economy? (2014)
- Impacts of Recent Mill Closures and Potential Biofuels Development on Maine's Forest Products Industry (2018)

Even topics that we may not think about often end up recurring in *Maine Policy Review*. In this issue, we publish an article by an interdisciplinary team of University of Maine students who report on the complex and difficult-to-solve issue of food waste management ("Circular Food Systems in Maine: Findings from an Interdisciplinary Study of Food Waste Management"). *MPR* has published articles on waste management since the very first volume (<https://mcspolicycenter.umaine.edu/mpr/mpr-reading-lists/waste-management/>). These articles

REFLECTIONS

raise questions of who has responsibility for dealing with waste. What is being lost in what we throw away and how do we address this problem? Here is a sample:

- Solid Waste Management in Local Municipalities (1991)
- Solid Waste Management Options for Maine: The Economics of Pay-by-the-bag Systems (1995)
- Landfill: Gas to Energy (2008)
- Moving up the Waste Hierarchy in Maine: Learning from “Best Practice” State-Level Policy for Waste Reduction and Recovery (2016)
- Maine’s Culture of Reuse and Its Potential to Advance Environmental and Economic Policy Objectives (2017)

As these examples indicate, there can be great benefit in looking across time to see how the topics have been approached. Looking back, we can see how these topics have been analyzed, and as we look forward, we can see gaps that remain in research and policy. And, by looking across time, it becomes apparent how interlinked the topics continue to be. Our waste issues are linked to food issues and to opportunities to find new ways to produce the energy we need. Our workforce challenges are linked to our changing demographics as well as to education. By looking at intertwined issues, we have a better chance of finding innovative ways to tackle these challenges.

I highly encourage you to investigate the reading lists on our website (<https://mcspolicycenter.umaine.edu/mpr/mpr-reading-lists/>) or visit

MPR’s Digital Commons (<https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mpr/>) site and use its search function to create your own reading list, by searching on terms that interest you. You might be surprised at the plethora of articles you will discover. In short, we can learn much from looking across time at *Maine Policy Review* articles on the issues that have long concerned us and on which we are making progress or continuing to struggle.

I’d like to end my column by introducing *MPR* readers to Daniel Soucier, who has recently been hired as the director of digital communications at the Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center. In that role, Dan will be helping *MPR* increase its outreach activities—through moderated blogs, social media discourse, and, we hope, in-person events around the state where *MPR* readers can interact with authors and have civil conversations about the policy issues facing Maine. Additionally, Dan will be taking the most widely read *MPR* articles and repackaging them in shorter—perhaps even audio—formats to engage new readers and make it easier for people to stay informed about important issues in Maine.

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