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Letter from the Editors

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Dear Readers,

With the announcement by Maine Commissioner of Education Susan Gendron of the state's intent to reduce the number of school administrative districts from 152 to 26, we have entered a new era. Heretofore, conversations and public "noise" about regionalization—a term that refers broadly to the consolidation of services—has been relatively quiet, with only the occasional local flare up in reaction to specific proposals.

The commissioner's bold announcement, however, moves this simmering issue to a boil. If reader comments posted to the state's daily print media websites serve as an indication of public reaction, then we should be readying ourselves for a public debate that is vigorous, rife with misperceptions, and sorely needed.

Here at *Maine Policy Review*, consistent with editorial policy, we neither endorse nor oppose the Governor's proposal. But we do believe it is the right time for Mainers to face this issue squarely. To that end, we are pleased to offer two vantage points on the issue of consolidation:

First, an interview with former Governor Angus King, in which he observes that Mainers have never been cognizant of the price tag resulting from our passion for local control; second, an article by David Wihry that examines Québec's recent experience with municipal consolidations. Both King and Wihry underscore the point that state government must play an active role in staging the debate, and in providing incentives strong enough to counter longstanding "local control" forces. Neither suggests the path forward in Maine will be an easy one.

We also feature two articles on the perennial issue of Maine's economy—an overview of the Maine Consensus Economic Forecasting Commission's 2006-2011 forecast by State Economist Catherine Reilly, and a summary of a recent study measuring visitor satisfaction with and the economic impact of Maine's state parks by a team from the Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center in partnership with Cindy Bastey, Chief Planner for the Bureau of Parks and Lands.

Finally, we feature an article on Maine's threatened "open-land" tradition—the public use of private lands without permission. Unique in the nation, this tradition has enabled the development of Maine's outdoor recreation and tourism industries, and a lifestyle in rural Maine that is fiercely cherished. Today, however, urban sprawl and troubling examples of public misuse of private lands have led increasing numbers of landowners to post their property. Moreover, recent large-scale land purchases and development proposals in northern Maine challenge this long-standing, but not legally binding, tradition. James Acheson examines such forces in detail, and calls for state actions to preserve the tradition. *Later in 2007, we will be publishing a full issue devoted to land use and development issues in Maine.*

Best,

