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Letter from the Editor

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Dear Readers,

Reflecting on the contents of this issue, one thread weaves its way through powerfully—the importance of self-determination, autonomy, and independence. We begin with an essay from Wayne Myers that shows northern Iraq, home of the Kurdish people, to be the democratic, open and tolerant society America espouses for the Middle East. But the sovereign status of the Kurds is subject to the outcome of the January elections. And, as Myers points out, many wonder whether American foreign policy has traded off this sovereignty in favor of a larger vision for all of Iraq—one that looks increasingly difficult to achieve, and that may jeopardize that which already has been achieved in northern Iraq.

Then, Stephen Brimley provides the lead article in a four-part examination of why native sovereignty is important and, in many ways, an aspiration not yet fully achieved among Maine's tribes. *I urge you to read this series from start to end.* Historically strained, tribal-state relations reached a new low following the Indian gaming referendum in 2003. Our hope in publishing this series is that it will lend enlightenment and the impetus to restart a much-needed dialogue in Maine. As Lawrence Rosen, our final author in this group, concludes, "we may yet recapture our mutual ability to negotiate in good faith and thereby reproduce good faith."

We move on to a set of articles and commentaries that weaves a different thread—that of healthcare costs and efficiency in Maine. The Dirigo Health Reform Act put in motion several ambitious processes—one of the most contentious being a study of hospital costs in Maine. Nancy Kane begins with a review of her recent examination of 10 years of hospital financial performance in Maine. She is followed by perspectives from the Maine Hospital Association and that of a cardiologist who also is a member of the study commission. Then, Lars Rydell explores the issue of how many tertiary regional medical centers currently exist in Maine and, relatedly, how many Maine can sustain.

Maine broke new ground with its passage of mental health parity legislation. Kitty Purington provides an overview of this legislation, which mandates that private insurers provide coverage for mental health conditions on a par with somatic conditions. At its core, such legislation is visionary in that it expands access not only to much-needed care, but also to the opportunity for those afflicted with mental illness to reclaim active, productive and whole lives.

Finally, we conclude with two articles on economic development. David Vail overviews an ecotourism branding and accreditation process recently launched in Sweden. No American state or region has taken such a step. In today's environment of cutthroat competition, were Maine to adopt something similar, we might be able to leapfrog the competition. Concluding this issue is Mark Drabenstott with the top 10 ways to reinvent rural regions. Although within a different context, he urges regions to exercise self-determination, to build strategic partnerships, to specialize, and to exploit niche opportunities. All sound advice.

This issue is packed full with important information and analyses pertaining to difficult choices facing all Mainers. Please share it with others and, don't forget, you can download the contents of our journal off our Web site.

Best,

