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Letter from the Editor

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Dear Readers,

Recently, at a local restaurant, I ordered a child-sized hotdog meal for my two-year-old daughter. What arrived from the kitchen was a large hotdog in a buttered and grilled roll and, beside it, a mound of french fries that easily dwarfed the remainder of the adult-sized plate on which it all was served. I was astonished. When I questioned the waitress—perhaps she'd brought an adult-sized meal instead—she said, "Oh, all our servings are large." She then proceeded to serve my husband and me; between the three of us, we easily could have served six.

Why do I recount this story? Because, as this issue's cover illustration suggests, our family had just experienced the quintessential American—and, sadly, Maine—eating experience, with the only difference being that we didn't clean our plates and we didn't add on super-sized desserts to complete the experience.

As Dora Mills in this issue points out, today, 25% of Maine's high school and middle school youth are overweight or obese—the highest percentage in New England. Maine also has high rates of chronic diseases, many of which are attributable to the underlying causes of poor nutrition, lack of physical activity, and tobacco use. Another factor affecting the health of many in Maine relates to the incidence of drug and alcohol abuse, which all too often ends tragically in death. Moreover, increasing numbers of Mainers lack access to affordable health care and prescription drugs. Thus, they postpone seeking care or filling prescriptions until they reach a crisis point when it's too late for treatments to be effective. In turn, this drives up the costs of health care and diminishes quality of life.

We devote four articles in this issue to these topics. First, Dr. Dora Mills, Maine's Bureau of Health Director, outlines the top 10 health issues facing Mainers today. Although many of these issues are the result of choices we make on a daily basis, Mills argues for proactive policies at all levels to create healthier living environments and lifestyles, and greater access to health care for all of Maine's populations.

We follow this article with a comprehensive overview of Maine's health insurance crisis. Dr. Wendy Wolf, Executive Director of the Maine Health Access Foundation, examines each of the factors contributing to Maine's esca-

lating health care costs and argues that we will not solve Maine's crises in cost or access until each of the players in our health care system agrees to make changes. Related to this topic, Dr. James Carroll, a consultant on the pharmaceutical industry, then covers the issue of rising prescription drug costs. He provides an overview and analysis of state actions to curb costs and expand access, including recent actions taken in Maine.

Then, Drs. Sorg and Greenwald, respectively, a forensic anthropologist at the University of Maine and the state's chief medical examiner, report on the results of a recently completed five-year study of drug deaths in Maine. As they point out, since 1997, the annual number of drug deaths in Maine has more than quadrupled, and accidental drug-related fatalities have risen sixfold. Furthermore, contrary to popular media coverage, prescription medications and not illicit drugs are involved in the majority of Maine's drug deaths, and many of these prescription medications are used by people from all walks of life. Sorg and Greenwald find that—like most of Maine's health problems—substance abuse (and particularly, alcohol abuse) is a problem in all areas of Maine, both rural and urban.

We lead off this issue with two articles that deal with free trade between the United States and Canada. University of Maine historian, Dr. Scott See, chronicles the history of free trade between the two countries from the Revolutionary War era up to passage of the Free Trade Agreement in 1989. Dr. Howard Cody, a political scientist at the University of Maine, picks up with passage of the Free Trade Agreement and NAFTA, and takes readers to the current day where—post September 11, 2001—trade and border issues have become inextricably combined.

For this issue's Margaret Chase Smith Essay, we feature not one but three remarkable essays on leadership, each written by a Maine high school senior, and each offering different lessons from history and from the great leaders of our past.

Thanks for reading and for your support.

Yours,

