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Celebrating Maine Policy Review's 20th Anniversary

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Celebrating Maine Policy Review's 20th Anniversary

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Celebrating *Maine Policy Review's* 20th Anniversary

by Ann Acheson, Ralph Townsend, Kathryn Hunt,
Merton G. Henry, Peter Mills and Linda Silka

This year we celebrate 20 years of publishing *Maine Policy Review*. We invited several people who have been closely associated with the journal over the years to provide their perspectives on *Maine Policy Review's* past, present, and future: Ralph Townsend, the founding editor; Kathryn Hunt, who served the journal for 13 years as managing editor and editor; Merton G. Henry, long-time colleague of Margaret Chase Smith and member and past chair of the Margaret Chase Smith Center Advisory Board; Peter Mills, current chair of the Center's Advisory Board and a contributor to the journal; and Linda Silka, director of the Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center.

"More Light than Heat"

By Ralph Townsend

Its contributions are, for the most part, on an intellectual level that sheds more light than heat on some of the most controversial issues of our times....It, therefore, probably will not make much news that will compete with hours of violence and sex on TV and columns on the bedroom lives of public figures in the press. But it deserves some quiet scrutiny by those who like a serious discussion of public problems.

—James Russell Wiggins,
Ellsworth American, Feb. 27, 1992,
Section II, page 1.

In the spring of 1991, I made an appointment to meet with Steve Ballard, then director of the Margaret Chase Smith Center for Public Policy [later renamed the Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center]. My purpose for meeting was modest: to suggest that Maine would benefit from a policy journal that discussed, analyzed, and debated policy issues that were specific to Maine. I had not expected to walk out the door an hour later as the founding editor of the *Maine Policy Review*.

I brought to my duties as founding editor a policy wonk's conviction that, in the long run, good policy analysis matters. During my five years as editor, the journal devoted a large share of its content to regulatory policy. To a small extent, this reflected my own interests. But regulatory policy was high on the state agenda, and the Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center had a particular interest in regulatory policy. States had become deeply engaged in questions of deregulation as the agenda shifted to state-level regulation of electricity and intra-state telecommunications. Siting, land-use policy, and environmental regulation were also being strenuously debated in most states, and certainly in Maine, in the 1990s. Because of this agenda, the Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center attracted support from public utilities and the natural resource industry for the "Public Regulation and the Environment" (PURE) project. That project provided the first five years of financial support for *Maine Policy Review*, and many articles during those years had their origins in presentations at the annual PURE conferences.

My goals for *Maine Policy Review* were modestly long run. I hoped it would publish some pithy analysis that some future governor or legislative committee chair would find by accident, and the analysis would thereby shape policy for the better. And in re-reading some articles from the early issues of 20 years ago, I think some of the contributions would still be useful today to those working in the legislative or regulatory process. So it was rewarding when Russell Wiggins, who had been managing editor of the *Washington Post* and U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, opined that we had achieved "more light than heat" in our first issue. Like all good editors, he did not praise without reservation: he did hint at a need to work a bit harder in some places with his qualifying "for the most part" in the quotation at the head.

When I stepped down as editor, I knew that the editorial team of Greg Gallant, Kathy Hunt, and Chris Spruce would not only sustain but improve *Maine Policy Review*. It is therefore a great pleasure to see the journal thriving on its 20th anniversary. Much like a parent watching children succeed on unforeseen paths, I still consider my role in *Maine Policy Review* as one of the most rewarding of my career.

Durable and Deep

By Kathryn Hunt

For 13 years I worked on *Maine Policy Review*—first, as managing editor and then, with the departure of the Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center director Steve Ballard, as editor. Over those years, the journal evolved from one primarily focused on regulation, utilities, and the environment to a multifaceted journal covering the breadth of issues affecting our state. With parallel improvements to its look and format, the journal came into its own as an enduring publication that I would describe as durable, deep, and an increasingly scarce public good.

What do I mean by durable and deep? The durability of the journal gets to the heart of what we tried to instill in *Maine Policy Review* from the start. At one point in my tenure as editor, the question was raised by our editorial board: “Why continue to publish in hard copy? Why not publish electronically?” The answer to this question, which helps to explain the journal’s durability, lies in my bookcase today—where every issue of *Maine Policy Review* resides and to which I turn when confronted with an issue that requires more than superficial understanding. So many of the challenges we confront today have deep and long histories that are important to understand, but which too often are forgotten in the currency of the moment. Our goal was to create a durable resource that lived in bookcases and on coffee tables, accessible because it wasn’t hidden or forgotten in a vast cyber world, and timely because the articles spoke to deep roots and consequently, would hold their value over time. (Of course, the journal is also available online, but I suspect I am not alone in preferring to find it in my bookcase.)

And what do I mean by increasingly scarce public good? Without a generous contribution from the Margaret Chase Smith Foundation every year, we would not have been able to achieve our goal of durability. We would also not have been able to provide the journal at no cost to readers. We debated at length whether to charge a subscription fee, even conducting reader surveys on the issue, and learned something surprising. Our readers were willing to make an annual charitable contribution to the journal at a level significantly higher than they were willing to pay for a subscription—sometimes a difference of hundreds of dollars. What to make of this finding? Here’s what we concluded. When *Maine Policy Review* is stacked against popular news and information sources in the private marketplace, the journal fares poorly: too deep, too infrequent, too hard to digest and regurgitate in sound bites. But, in the public marketplace, *Maine Policy Review* is a valued public good, helping not only to inform but also to educate Maine’s citizenry. Normally, I would extend this thought to suggest that it is in the public domain where multifaceted issues are still given the considered attention they deserve. Given the state of politics today, however, I think I’ll end by saying that at least in *Maine Policy Review*, serious issues are still treated seriously. And I think people are still hungry for this.

Rambling Thoughts

By Merton G. Henry

Senator Margaret Chase Smith, in a life spanning most of the 20th century, embodied those traits of independence, integrity, and dedication to public service that Maine cherishes in its political leaders. Since World War II, Maine has been blessed with a line of superb leaders in both Washington and Augusta. *Maine Policy Review* reflects the traits of these political leaders by raising and discussing major issues confronting our state.

Today we live in a highly partisan political society with seemingly endless bickering and an inability to reach across party lines to solve problems. During her political career from 1940 to 1973, Senator Smith lived and worked in an era when reaching across the aisle

and compromise were not anathema. When Senator Smith was asked by the University of Maine for permission to use her name in connection with its policy center, she insisted that the policy center be nonpartisan if her name was to be involved. Nothing has reflected that nonpartisanship better than *Maine Policy Review* over the past 20 years.

Both the Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center and *Maine Policy Review* have had outstanding leadership, which has contributed immeasurably to their increasing recognition and influence in Maine. As new issues confront Maine, both the Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center and *Maine Policy Review* stand ready to help address those issues in our ever changing society. The best years of both still lie ahead.

Policy Versus Politics

By Peter Mills

With 20 years of *Maine Policy Review* laid out on my dining room table, it is easy to be overwhelmed by what we find within these several thousand pages—an abundance of inquisitive energy, analysis, candor, and values encapsulated in what has become an encyclopedia of careful thinking about the social and political fabric of our small state.

It has not always been clear how to identify the audience for such a journal—whether it be legislators, executive branch administrators, town managers, town leaders, school leaders, lawyers, or students of policy. But one thing is sure: *Maine Policy Review* has found its way into the hands (and minds) of those who make a difference in how we live. In the fields of education, agriculture, utilities, the environment, taxation, and economics, the journal has provided a place for pragmatic people to do their deepest thinking about the future of our polity.

Day-to-day public news is too often consumed with temporal politics, the *sturm und drang* of who's winning and losing. TV and news outlets recount daily conflicts as though they were sporting events. Important public issues are reduced to a contest of wills between blind ideologies with name calling and negative ads fueled by cash from biased billionaires.

Not so at *Maine Policy Review*. There is a sense that if thoughtful people gather facts, analyze them carefully, seek peer advice, and keep asking questions, certain answers will emerge, answers that actually work when based on experience and an open-minded willingness to amend and adjust.

It is too often true that politics makes a painful mess of the noblest policy. As an academic friend of mine so cynically observes, "In politics, the plural of anecdote is policy." But it need not always be so. In the long run, politicians will respond to good policy so long as it remains a visible lodestar to provide a direction and focus for political energy.

Maine Policy Review is Maine's policy lodestar. Because she knew and believed that politics must always be guided by sound policy, Margaret Chase Smith would be so proud.

Reflections of a "Newcomer"

By Linda Silka

When I was asked to become the director of the Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center in 2009, a major draw was the opportunity to join the group of colleagues producing the *Maine Policy Review*. From Massachusetts, where I was then located, I had watched how this publication was deepening and informing policy discussions in Maine. My associates at universities in Massachusetts were eager to learn how such a journal had originated and how it maintained its edge because there are few data-driven, scholarly publications that, at the same time, are written for leaders and citizens who use the information for creating real policies.

Articles in *Maine Policy Review* have been important in framing discussions on so many topics. As I travel throughout Maine representing the Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center, I frequently meet people who want to discuss (that is, agree with or argue about) an idea they learned about in *Maine Policy Review*. Most recently these lively discussions have included the special issues on food and on sustainability. From Portland to Fort Kent, people I've met want to talk about the ways these two issues

are helping them to think through difficult questions about Maine's economic future and how that future may be tied to reinventing the state's agricultural past and developing ways to link fishing, farming, and forestry in rural and urban settings.

In the last year, as I have traveled to conferences and workshops around the country, I've begun taking along copies of the latest *Maine Policy Review* to show the approach we in Maine have created for bringing together ideas, people, and topics and avoiding partisan stalemates. Maine remains an important exemplar of how people can work together across the aisle and across disciplinary boundaries and do so in ways that are informed by the latest scholarship that is written in a way that can lead directly to action.

Some Closing Thoughts

By Ann Acheson

Reading the complimentary words about *Maine Policy Review* from this group of thoughtful people has reminded me again why I have so enjoyed the unexpected opportunity that came my way when I was asked to be managing editor 10 years ago, and then became editor in 2008. It's good to take step back from the everyday tasks of hounding authors for overdue articles, editing drafts, and worrying about scarce resources to reflect on what the journal is all about and how much it means to its readers and contributors.

As others here have noted, *Maine Policy Review* has grown and evolved over the last 20 years, but remains true to its mission of providing "independent, peer-reviewed analyses of public policy issues relevant to Maine," as the statement reads on our masthead.

One of the ways *Maine Policy Review* has changed in recent years is in the increasing number of special issues on a particular theme. From the journal's founding in 1992 through 2006, there had only been two special issues: housing (1999) and aging (2003). Since 2007, we have published five special issues on various, but important, topics: the future of Maine's North Woods (2007), climate change and energy (2008), early childhood (2009), Maine's food system

(2011), and sustainability (2012). Another special issue, on libraries and information in Maine, is scheduled for winter/spring 2013. In all of these cases, people have approached us with proposals for the issue and have worked closely with us on the issue's development and production as guest editors. We have been honored to have some eminent political figures write the Margaret Chase Smith Essay in recent special issues, including Senator Olympia Snowe, former first Lady Barbara Bush, former Senator George Mitchell, Representative Chellie Pingree, and Agriculture Department Undersecretary Kevin Concannon.

As *Maine Policy Review* moves forward, we continue to wrestle with the question of the best format for such a journal in the digital age. Many journals have ceased to publish in hard copy and only exist in electronic format. Many people today, especially younger ones, now "consume" most content via electronic means. Moreover, hard-copy publishing and distribution are expensive, in the case of *Maine Policy Review* usually accounting for 25 percent of our total costs. For the near future, at least, we do not plan on converting the journal to a solely online existence. However, we have for many years made *Maine Policy Review* available on our Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center website and have now moved to a new phase in making the journal more widely accessible. Our new online "presence" is through the University of Maine Digital Commons, where both current and past issues are now available (digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mpr/). *Maine Policy Review* will now be much more "visible" to users of Internet search engines and also will benefit from being part of an extensive collection of quality academic research. 🐟