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# Introduction: Ask Not ... Voices from Maine Addressing Climate Change and Energy

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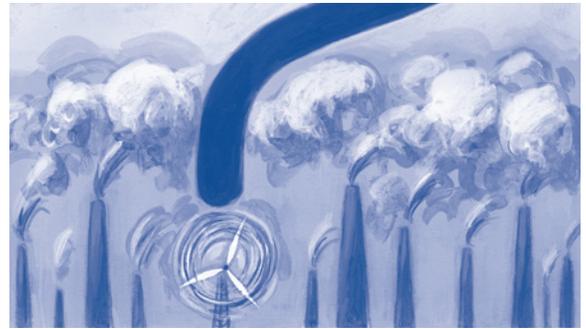
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# Introduction:

## *Ask Not... Voices from Maine Addressing Climate Change and Energy*

by Sam Townsend, Guest Editor



“Ask Not ...Voices from Maine” was my title for this collection of feature articles and essays addressing climate change and oil dependency in Maine from the inception of this project in early 2007. “Ask Not” has been a part of my DNA ever since President John F. Kennedy, in his January 20, 1961, inaugural address, asked of his fellow Americans: “Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.” To the world’s citizens, he said: “Ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man.”

In the summer of 1961, a year out of Hamilton College and awaiting a fifth grade teaching assignment at the Landon School for Boys in Bethesda, Maryland, I was the summer phone receptionist and librarian in the Washington bureau of the *Herald Tribune*, housing perhaps some of the most influential and dedicated journalists of the period. Inspired by their energy and enthusiasm and fortunate to hear several renowned national and international speakers at the National Press Club, just a few floors above the bureau’s office, I was inspired to develop a book of essays by thoughtful Americans regarding the needs and aspirations of the U.S. at that time. The book was to be titled “Ask Not.” *Herald Tribune* columnist Rowland Evans, a close friend of President Kennedy’s, encouraged my effort. Together we consulted with a publisher friend of his who liked the idea, but advised against going forward. He said it would take until the fall of 1963 to get it assembled and published—too late to have any impact!

Several times throughout my life since President Kennedy’s assassination on November 22, 1963, I have wondered what would have become of “Ask Not” had it been published. I have also often thought of numerous opportunities to publish editions of “Ask Not” at several anniversary dates of President Kennedy’s life and his presidency, focusing on various new challenges to our country and the world.

As a young man caught up in the aura of the ask-not generation I went on to graduate school, another short teaching stint, and then to 10 years at the Eisenhower Fellowships. Today I am a resident in Maine, where my wife and I have raised two sons, one of whose thinking about the environment and our globe's sustainability influenced me greatly.

With extensive experience in the energy sector and having reached retirement age but not accepting the practice of it, in 2007, along with some consulting assignments, I began promoting biofuels throughout Maine. Returning to past ideas of "Ask Not," I began contemplating how that concept might be used to address what many began considering our great challenges—climate change and oil dependency.

After seeing Al Gore's film "An Inconvenient Truth" and conducting extensive research, I began thinking of a current "Ask Not," one to address the national issues of climate change and oil dependency. I soon realized the topic on a national basis was too huge to manage effectively. Wisely encouraged by a friend to "think locally," I decided to focus on what was and is evolving in the state of Maine concerning these issues. Familiar with environmental and energy developments in the state, I realized that several dedicated individuals, companies, and organizations in Maine have made and continue to make noteworthy and pioneering efforts toward reducing carbon footprints, conserving energy consumption, using alternative energy, and employing new technologies to reduce the use of fossil fuels. I also recognize that historically in the U.S. local initiatives become regional and slowly reach the national and perhaps international stage.

Simultaneously, I felt that the public in general was not sufficiently aware of the dangers of oil dependency and climate change, nor were elected officials paying adequate attention to these issues. In early 2007, a major report done in the United Kingdom, "The Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change," convinced me that action on climate change and oil dependency needed to be taken sooner rather than later. Delaying action or failing to address these issues would be ruinous to the world's economies and could bring severe harm to many of the globe's inhabitants, human and otherwise.

If President Kennedy were to give his inaugural address today, I believe he would likely admit that these interrelated challenges and dangers, sufficiently difficult for the wealthy, industrialized countries, are even larger and more daunting for the developing world. To avoid catastrophic harm before it is too late, he might call upon us all to rapidly build in each of our countries the political will to assure that these serious issues are addressed. Echoing his January 20, 1961, address, he might today request of all of the globe's citizens: "Ask not what we each can take from this earth, but how we can together equitably sustain prosperity and quality of life through affordable, renewable, and self-sufficient energy supplies for all future generations."

Accordingly, "Ask Not ...Voices from Maine" has been developed, in collaboration with the editorial staff at *Maine Policy Review*, as a special issue of the journal, featuring a collection of articles and essays by knowledgeable, thoughtful citizens of Maine from all walks of life. The authors here highlight initiatives in Maine that can serve as examples to those in and beyond the state, initiatives that can be replicated to address the daunting challenges of oil dependency and climate change.

Thinking Maine was a good place from which to undertake this project was not inappropriate. In July 2007, the Union of Concerned Scientists suggested that "with its reputation as a state of sensible and resourceful people and a history of national leadership in environmental policy, Maine...is well positioned to drive national and international action" (UCS 2007: 5). The state of Maine and its citizens were already addressing many issues of climate change and oil dependency. New initiatives are continuously being

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developed to ameliorate and offset the effects of them on the state:

- Maine leads all the U.S. states in the amount of alternative energy in its energy mix.
- Maine is currently the only state in the nation that has implemented shoreline regulations taking potential sea level rise into account.
- Several Maine companies, municipalities, universities, and businesses have taken noteworthy strides to reduce their carbon footprint, use alternative energy sources, and achieve energy security through energy efficiency.
- Maine uses 100 percent renewable energy in state-owned buildings.
- Maine has been a leading advocate for the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), a cooperative effort by 10 Northeastern states to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.
- Governor Baldacci, in the summer of 2008, signed an executive order requiring the use of green construction technology and certified wood for state-owned and state-financed building construction and renovation.
- Many in the state are advocating the development of renewable energy technologies; several initiatives are underway, and many more are in the planning stage.

The article by David P. Littell, Gary S. Westerman, and Malcolm C. Burson outlines Maine's many accomplishments in addressing and accomplishing admirable goals towards reduction of levels of greenhouse gas emissions and associated environmental and socioeconomic impacts. It also references a number of articles included in this special issue that expand upon specific accomplishments and plans in progress.

In spite of these and many other actions, the impacts and realities of climate change (see articles by Colgan and Merrill and Jacobson et al.) will be with us in Maine for the long term. This issue includes articles that outline some of the possible effects of climate change on Maine; these effects are real, and the state's leadership and state planners must recognize the impli-

cations and prepare for them as Samuel Merrill, Robert Sanford, and Mark Lapping point out.

Continued dependency on fossil fuels, especially oil, is likely to have ongoing impacts in Maine. A \$147 cost for a barrel of oil caused many to admit that further increases in the price of fossil fuels could make Maine a difficult place to inhabit. As Elizabeth Wilson points out in her article, "Maine is at a particular disadvantage because of our dependency on home heating oil and transportation fuels and our higher-than-average utility costs." Authors Dale McCormick and Lucy Van Hook point out that for 84 percent of Maine homes, oil is the primary source of heat—not an enviable situation.

Up to this point, Maine has been at the end of the energy supply chain and in each of the last three years, the state has witnessed a near miss in its supply of LNG, propane, or electricity. Although William Hastings indicates this situation may be changing, for political and national security reasons, Maine, like all states and our nation, must wean itself of the fossil fuel components in its energy mix. Public policymakers in Maine and beyond must face these realities sooner rather than later.

Even though oil prices have recently fallen well below anyone's wildest imagination, it is expected they will turn around and perhaps go toward \$200 to \$300 a barrel. No one can predict where oil prices will go, but as Dylan Voorhees suggests, "We must not lose our sense of urgency—even as oil prices temporarily decline—if we want to enjoy long-term economic and energy security." As Elizabeth Wilson urges, we must not repeat the mistake of letting temporary lower oil prices result in less investment in both fossil fuels and renewables.

The low oil prices of late 2008 and early 2009 should not fool us or dilute our efforts to reduce oil dependency or make us believe the dangers of climate change have receded. As Adam Cote points out, these issues are a vital component of President Obama's agenda. They need to remain on the national agenda and must be given strong, enduring support.

The initiatives highlighted in this special issue of *Maine Policy Review* represent only a few of the many actions being undertaken in the state to ameliorate the effects of climate change and the state's depen-

dence upon petroleum products. Initiatives discussed range from Efficiency Maine started in 2002 (Vrabel) to a recent study of how to revitalize the forest industry and its competitiveness by making use of the available renewable wood feedstocks in Maine, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia for the production of bioenergy and biofuels (Olesen). Scores of initiatives have been taken, especially over the past few months as oil reached its highest cost ever. We regret that these efforts could not all be included in this special issue.

This has been an enjoyable undertaking. I am most grateful to many who over the last two years have advised on how this collection of articles and essays should be shaped. To them my sincere thanks. I wish also to express special and great appreciation to the committed individuals whose thoughtful pieces appear in this issue and to several others who submitted articles for consideration that we were unable to include. To Ann Acheson, editor, and Barbara Harrity, assistant managing editor, of *Maine Policy Review*, my deepest gratitude for their patience and painstaking work to substantially enrich my initial vision and make it a reality.

We hope this collection of articles and essays can go some distance in convincing those who read them that there are opportunities to effect change. What may be required is humankind's greatest mobilization effort, perhaps requiring a global governance and technological revolution the likes of which has never before been seen. 🐳



**Sam Townsend** spent much of his career working globally as a consultant for energy and environmental firms. He also has a background in education and nonprofit organizations and was the first president of the Eisenhower Fellowships. He has been promoting the use of biodiesel in Maine, and in November 2008 was appointed the executive director of the Environmental and Energy Technology Council of Maine (E2Tech).

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