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Letter from the Editor

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DEAR READERS,

The 1999 Governor's Economic Development Conference adopted the theme, "What We Can Learn From How Ireland Transformed Its Economy." Rather than fly three hundred fifty conference participants to Ireland (however desirable this might have been), we brought Ireland to us. Here we print the conference addresses of two key figures in Ireland's transformation. Their message is startlingly simple: Change requires a concerted will to do so and the staying power to withstand changes in government administration and political leadership.

One of the keys to Ireland's success has been its investment in the education and skills of its people, which began in earnest more than thirty years ago. To that end, we feature a conversation with Sally Vamvakias, former chair of the University of Maine System Board of Trustees, and an article about Maine's changing demographics. This issue also marks the first in a new millennium, and we couldn't resist the opportunity to include two articles that chronicle one hundred years of change in Maine, respectively focused on the health of Maine's people and the health of our forests. We conclude with a commentary that argues for retaining income as one of two factors in Maine's school funding formula, thus broadening and continuing our coverage of this important issue.

The thread that binds each of these articles is no more complicated than the message of our Irish neighbors: Change requires a compelling, shared vision of the future. In this regard, I sometimes wonder if Maine will overcome its ambivalence of vision—while we desire better roads, we despair the traffic that accompanies such improvements; while we applaud new business development, we want our communities to remain the way they have always been. One might ask, what is Maine's vision of the future? Having a vision requires having more than a statement on paper. It requires frank conversations about what we are willing to give up in order to gain something new.

Furthermore, do we have the will to change? Do we have the will to stay the course through changes in political leadership and changes in our citizenry? I find it ironic that in an era of term limits, where we have decided that shorter is somehow better, what is required of us is, in fact, the will and the staying power to think and act long-term. Indeed, longer is better. Perhaps this is the greatest lesson we can learn from Ireland's success. Perhaps this is the kind of thinking that is called for in a new millennium.

Enjoy the issue,

