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Politics Then and Now: Looking Forward

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Looking Forward

Amy Fried

Maine has plenty of issues, of course: healthcare costs, an aging population, slow economic growth, all kinds of things, but we still have a lot going for us. Unlike what unfolded in Washington, Maine avoided a government shutdown this past spring. Most debates in Maine politics continue to be conducted with civility and mutual respect. Nationally, as we see more name calling, polarization, and a degree of nastiness, there remains much civility and respect here.

[Another] Maine advantage is that the moderate center has been preserved here. We have U.S. Senator Susan Collins, who will be coming up for reelection and has no primary challenger at present. In this time in U.S. history, that's pretty remarkable. In a lot of other states, a center-right Republican like Collins would have been "primaried" from the right, and there would have been a lot of money placed behind her challenger.

Maine has shown a continuing commitment to citizen participation by restoring same-day voter registration in 2011. We still tend to be in the top five (states) nationally for voter turnout in every election and often in the top three.

Ken Fredette

In my first session, the 125th Legislature, I served on the Appropriations Committee, where I had the opportunity to work with Representative John Martin of Eagle Lake, a legend in Maine politics and government. I learned a lot from him in two years. We developed a very good working relationship, and that's really what the legislature is about, developing those relationships. I think that's what may be lacking at the federal level today. People are so worried about raising money or getting back home to campaign that they never to know who their colleagues are. I believe that's something that's going to change over time.

Money and the influence of independent expenditures are fundamentally changing the game here in Maine and nationally. You have these different organizations now...that get hundreds of millions of dollars in them, and they can decide whether or not they want to spend it against you. That's a very tough thing to fight against. It's to change the way we go forward. I do believe the system can adapt, however; inevitably, there

will be reforms, and we will continue to be a great society, nonetheless.

Cynthia Dill

America's biggest challenge is that we are becoming a plutocracy, one that controls the government. And the government is prisoner to this plutocracy. We're caught up in a cycle of wealth's having undue influence on our politics, and our politics then being the slave to those who are wealthy. Right now, the people who govern need exorbitant amounts of money to win elections.

There are some positive signs on the horizon. First, there's the question of whether we want to have publicly financed campaigns. There have been bills kicking around in Congress for a while. In Maine we have publicly financed elections, and there are problems with it because there are leadership PACs and there's still private money. But publicly financed campaigns give people opportunities to run for office. We could have a constitutional amendment of some sort, a legislative reform. We could have primaries that are not partisan. There are various things that we can do to get at what is ailing us as Americans; we need to take action. 🐟

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Amy Fried is a professor of political science at the University of Maine. She is author of *Pathways to Polling* (2011), an analysis of the evolution of public opinion research in the United States. She has also contributed many articles to political science journals, including the *American Political Science Review*. Fried writes a regular column on Maine public affairs for the *Bangor Daily News*.



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