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LD 395

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Extending to Wabanaki Nations most existing and future federal laws which already apply to the other 570 Federally recognized Tribes in the lower 48 will benefit both the Wabanaki and the people of Maine. Most of you are aware of the Kennedy School Harvard University study that looked in depth at Tribes and federal programs.

Tribes in Maine which have not had most laws and programs put into effect are decidedly at a disadvantage from all other federally recognized tribes. The study shows that it is not only the Tribes who lose out but surrounding communities as well.

Tribes in Maine are beginning to re-acquire lands that the Maine Lands Claim Settlement Act promised. Support for the state to improve its relationship with the Tribes the state has increased over the past several years as citizens become aware of the current quasi municipal model.

The current system is not working. There are remedies for improvement. Arguments that changes to the status quo are too complicated, are understandable but not convincing. The laws and civic arrangements that exist now were created by the State, the State can change them.

As a state we could look at this as an opportunity to collaborate. The adversarial relationship is exhausting for both the legislature and the Tribes. Non Wabanaki citizens and the Wabanaki tribes members share a history which is uncomfortable to put it mildly. This discomfort plays itself out over and over again at the state level. We can face the history and move toward a more just arrangement and society.

Tribal sovereignty is an issue that will not go away; the tribes are not leaving their homeland, and supporters of sovereignty for the tribes are not going away either. Tribes are acquiring land promised in the Indian Land Claims settlement act. If LD 785 and LD 395 become law this will give us an opportunity to usher in a new era of collaboration between State leaders and Tribal leaders. Both bills are based on consensus recommendations from a bipartisan task force convened by the Maine Legislature to address long-standing issues with a land claims act passed in 1980 that governs the relationship between the state and the tribes in Maine.