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MAINE VOICES: *Sen. Lynn Bromley*

Don't put government on autopilot

I strenuously disagree with Peter Cianchette's recent analysis of Maine's problems ("It's too late for small steps to affect Maine's economy") and I am equally troubled by his prescription for change. Doom-and-gloom rhetoric, followed by tired and defeated policy proposals, do not make a recipe for success in either politics or business.

Cianchette, assisted by many of his colleagues around Maine, continues to sound the drumbeat of negativity about our state.

Their political agenda is to create an atmosphere of chaos and despair - and then present themselves as the "common sense" or "bold" leaders willing to rescue our poor, beleaguered citizens from a future of bread, water and public assistance.

This tactic is incredibly destructive. What would our education system look like if we continually decry the failing students and ignored the honor roll? I will be the first one to stand up and say we have problems that need addressing - but I will never join the chorus of those determined to sell disaster and fear to the people of Maine.

Cianchette's "plan" is unworkable. Putting government on autopilot (arbitrary caps on all levels of government) and instituting minority rule (additional 2/3 requirements for budgetary measures) has nothing to do with "bold leadership" and everything to do with advancing a personal and political agenda.

Many of these measures have been tried in other states, and the results are mixed at best. Colorado, poster-child for spending caps, is in the midst of a campaign to reject their budgeting process because it is too restrictive.

Our economy is in transition from old to new. The market we operated in just 20 years ago is vastly different today. Our Maine economy is being "globalized" and this presents both threats and opportunities.

There is broad agreement that embracing a strategy of innovation and entrepreneurship is the winning strategy for economic development and Maine is well positioned to make this transition.

Ideas and corporations are mobile. Entrepreneurs are place bound. They are here and want to remain here.

I firmly believe that it is the duty of those who are serious about progress to put aside our electoral agendas and honestly assess the situation. I implore Cianchette and others to look at what is working and help us to do more of it.

Cianchette is correct, however, in supposing that "Maine people are looking for a reason to believe in something." There are plenty of reasons to believe right now - and none of them require old, defeated and extreme policies.

Here are a few indicators that Cianchette's "chasm" is a vast overstatement of the facts on the ground:

- The greater Portland area was recently rated as the No. 1 area in the entire country for starting a small business.
- Maine was recently named a finalist by the U.S. Small Business Administration for "best practice" in supporting technology start-up businesses.
- There are hundreds of Maine entrepreneurs succeeding and approaching success, many of whom began with a seed grant from the Maine Technology Institute, a national model for innovation and commercialization.

Sadly, these amazing entrepreneurs are largely invisible, in part because they are home "minding the store" and not in the halls of the State House, but also because Cianchette and others seem all too eager to overlook them.

Finally, we are in the midst of reacting to the terrible news about our military facilities and the impact the BRAC decision will have on Maine people if its recommendations are approved.

Our economy will be sent into a tailspin in the short term and we need all hands on deck helping and encouraging cooperation at all levels of government to assist in the great transformation that will occur for thousands of Mainers and two whole regions of our state.

In this struggle, no step can be ignored - not even the little ones that Cianchette so easily dismisses. Economic development is not a partisan issue and the people of Maine are now, more than ever, counting on us to work together.

- *Special to the Press Herald*

Distributed at the request of Senator Lynn Bromley