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Our energy sky is not falling

By J Dwight , *Populist Economics*
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Mainers should take the 'Quality of Place' idea to heart—and move to New Hampshire.

In a recent study by CNBC that scored the 50 states, New Hampshire ranked 2nd for Quality of Life, upstaging Maine which ranked 14th out of 50. CNBC used several factors, including local attractions, the crime rate, and health care to rate Quality of Life.

States also received points based on their rankings in 40 other metrics. CNBC then put those metrics into the ten broad categories. The results are on CBNC's website under 'America's Top States for Business 2008'

Overall, Maine rated in the bottom ten at 44th, while our neighbor held position at 27th. Well, I guess New Hampshire can't win them all.

Maine scored relatively poorly in seven out of ten categories, ranking in the bottom ten in Transportation (40th), and Access to Capital (40th), Technology & Innovation (41st), Cost of Business (43rd), Overall (44th), Economy (44th), and Workforce (45th).

In other words, the Maine Government is incompetent in seven out of ten categories.

In three out of ten categories Maine scored relatively well, ranking in the top ten in only one, Education (8th), which arguably has to do with its three 'Ivy League' private colleges. Maine scored 14th in Quality of Life, given the incredible beauty that is the State the government can take little credit for it. In Business Friendliness it ranked 23rd.

We don't hear our Democrat-dominated legislature, or the Baldacci administration proclaiming some 'crisis' and announcing some great government program to improve Maine's economy. Given Maine governments' propensity for malignant incompetence, I find that good.

Malignant incompetence is a phrase I heard on a local radio as a way to describe the last thirty years of Democrat rule in Maine. It is an unusual phrase.

Incompetence is often used to describe that which is just bumbling, like nincompoop. But 'malignant incompetent' means that the perpetrators are not nincompoops, but purposefully, passionately, and relentlessly malevolent. This is hard to accept, but not to see.

Here are several areas of legislative and administrative malignant incompetence:

- Electric Utility costs in Maine are 30% to 50% higher because of laws passed by the Legislature amounting to an extra cost to Mainers of $1 billion annually. Prior to 1979 Maine's private utility industry had developed a diversified utility production base 20% hydro, 40% nuclear, 20 % Canadian, and 20% oil. Maine has increased its dependence on oil to almost 60% today. And, we are tearing out hydroelectric dams that will further worsen the situation.
- Maine's transportation infrastructure and schools are crumbling. Despite the second highest level of real estate taxes nationwide and higher per gallon taxes on fuel than all other New England states but one. Plenty of money, no competence.
- During the last eight years the Democrats and the Baldacci Administration have lost over $100 million: $20 million in ill fated sub-prime backed commercial paper, $30 million in the corrupt PinRX program, $50 million in a botched computer upgrade. Additionally, Maine's debt to hospitals of $430 million and the $30 million owed to the Feds go unpaid. Not to mention, that almost $1 billion in unfunded liabilities to the state's pension system goes un-addressed. These are only the money problems we know about, that have been reported in the sympathetic press. What would be found if we really went digging?
- Despite massive and endless 'entitlement' programs in Maine to 'relieve the plight of the poor' Maine's poor population keeps getting larger. Over one third of Maine families receive some sort of 'public' assistance today, versus less than ten percent at the beginning of the seventies. The best 'welfare program' is a good private sector job, which the legislature has done its best to rid Maine of. Quality of place when you can't find a decent job?
- The response to the recent energy crisis is typical: force utility producers to 40% 'renewable' power up from 30%, which is 10 times more than the average. But exclude hydro as a renewable source?
- Despite repeated warnings and that polices being put into place over the last thirty years that would lead to the worsening of the economy and lifestyle in Maine, and despite warnings of the same today, Maine policy makers continue down the same path.

It is hard to admit, but the problem is really us. We keep voting these people into office, and allowing bureaucratic malignant incompetence to go unchallenged. I fear that things will have to get worse, a lot worse, before they get better.

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