

The increasing costs of public education, however, will inevitably produce even more push-backs from taxpayers if the Legislature acts feebly. It is important to remember that the Taxpayer Bill of Rights wasn't defeated by a landslide last year. In fact, it earned a majority vote in Androscoggin and Oxford counties.

Maine must choose to align with one underdog: Is it the small communities and towns that might eventually die because their small, rural school was closed because of consolidation pressures? Or is it the beleaguered taxpayer tired of shelling out more money for K-12 education?

The great fear of the taxpayer is that the humanitarian appeal to preserve the livelihood of people in their small towns and communities will ultimately win out over rational school consolidation reform. Reformers should not underestimate the power of this appeal.

According to historian Crane Brinton, the humanitarian "presumably feels love, or friendship toward the object of his concern; yet his strongest emotion is a kind of imaginative flinching before the spectacle of inflicted pain." If a majority of the Legislature view themselves as humanitarians, they will naturally shy away from hurting citizens.

Long-term change, though, will require some pain.

Karl Trautman is chairperson of the social sciences department at Central Maine Community College. He received his doctorate in political science from the University of Hawaii. He can be reached at karltrautman@yahoo.com.