



## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### *About the Maine Clean Election Act*

#### **What exactly is Clean Elections?**

It is a voluntary system of full public financing for candidates.

#### **Which offices are covered by Clean Elections?**

In Maine, candidates for State Representative, State Senate and Governor may choose Clean Elections instead of relying on private donations.

#### **Does everyone who gets on the ballot get public money?**

No. Not every candidate opts into the Clean Election system. Those who do must first demonstrate that they have substantial support from voters in their district in order to qualify.

#### **Where does the money come from?**

It comes from the Maine Clean Election Fund which has several sources of funding. Every year, \$2 million is deposited from the General Fund, and it earns interest until it is needed for an election. The \$5 Qualifying Contributions that candidates collect go into the Fund, too. Maine taxpayers can check "Yes" for Clean Elections on their income tax form, and this money is transferred into the Fund.

#### **What was the question that was on the ballot in 1996?**

"Do You Want Maine to Adopt New Campaign Finance Laws and Give Public Funding to Candidates for State Office Who Agree to Spending Limits?"

#### **Why isn't there enough money?**

There is enough for this year's election. In the past, the legislature and governor have used Clean Election funds for other state programs rather than allowing it to accrue interest in the "special, dedicated, non-lapsing" interest-bearing fund that the law calls for. Luckily, enough funds were restored in time for the next election, so the Fund has never been short.

#### **Member Organizations**

AARP Maine, Common Cause Maine, EqualityMaine, League of Women Voters of Maine, League of Young Voters, Maine AFL-CIO, Maine Council of Churches, Maine People's Alliance/Maine People's Resource Center, NAACP-Portland, Maine State Employees Association/SEIU Local 1989, Maine Women's Lobby, Sierra Club Maine Chapter

### **Didn't the ballot initiative create an unfunded liability for the state?**

Not at all. Voters approved the public funding system as part of a citizen-initiated law that included a responsible funding mechanism that called for equivalent cuts in the administrative budgets of the legislative and executive branches of government. These cuts were made during the administration of Governor Angus King as part of the implementation of Clean Elections.

### **Why do taxpayers have to pick up the bill for politicians?**

Voters approved the system in order to reduce the influence of special interest money in our elections. The system is voluntary, so candidates don't have to use it, but most Maine people would prefer that the candidates who want to represent them in Augusta use Clean Elections rather than going to special interests for campaign donations.

### **How much per year is it costing me as a taxpayer?**

Not much. It costs Maine people around two dollars each per year.

### **Seems like a lot of money in the Governor's race.**

Running a statewide race is expensive. The Clean Election Fund provides just enough money to run a viable, but not extravagant, campaign. When candidates are up against a high-spending opponent and/or lots of independent spending, more money is paid out, but the overall amount is capped.

### **It's tough times and lean budgets. Can the State afford this?**

When times are tough, it's ordinary rank and file Mainers who feel it the most. That's not the time to turn Maine elections over to those with the deepest pockets. In a tight budget climate, it's more important than ever that legislators identify the right priorities for Maine. When people are elected to office without accepting money from special interests, they have a very different relationship with the lobbyists who represent those interests. Maine people benefit when decision-makers are not compromised by a reliance on private money.

### **It's just an entitlement program for politicians. They don't want to do the hard work.**

There's no entitlement, and there is plenty of work involved! When candidates use Clean Elections, they don't do the "hard work" of dialing up wealthy people and corporations for campaign donations. They knock on the doors of friends, neighbors, and community members and have a conversation about the issues that matter. They ask for a Qualifying Contribution of \$5 to help them qualify for Clean Election funding. It takes many conversations and many \$5 checks! Once qualified, Clean Election candidates have a strict spending limit and may not raise additional money or spend their own money on their campaign. They do the "hard work" of planning a budget and using discipline to stick to it.

### **What difference has Clean Elections made?**

A lot. First, a more diverse pool of candidates can run for office. Many very fine legislators, including some who serve in leadership and chair committees, say they would not have run without the opportunity that the Clean Election system provides. More women have run, and more young people, too.

Second, the cost of campaigns has not risen in Maine the way it has in other parts of the country. Clean Election campaigns do not employ expensive campaign materials or strategies. They rely on shoe leather and voter contact along with a modest amount of mailings, advertisements and signs.

Third, candidates tell us that running under Clean Elections makes for a better campaign because there is much more time to talk with and listen to voters. They spend time with the people they will represent, not with the wealthy donors, corporations and PACs who fund traditional campaigns.

### **Who uses Clean Elections?**

A significant majority of all candidates use Clean Elections – almost 80% this year. That is 85% of candidates running for Senate and 76% of those running for the House. Participation is across all parties. For example, 94% of Senate Republican candidates and 68% of House Republicans are running Clean. For Democrats, it's 89% of Senate candidates and 82% of House candidates. Other participating candidates are Greens and independents.

### **Isn't the real problem in Washington, DC?**

Without a doubt, special interest money is a driving force in Washington. The Fair Elections Now Act is a public funding system for congressional candidates, and it is pending in Congress right now. Representatives Mike Michaud and Chellie Pingree both support the bill. Senators Snowe and Collins have not declared their support yet.

### **What happens if a Clean Election candidate has a wealthy opponent who can spend a lot more money?**

If the opponent spends more than the Clean Election candidate's spending limit, then the Clean Election candidate receives dollar-for-dollar matching funds. The matching funds are capped, so it is possible for the wealthy opponent to outspend the Clean Election candidate. But most of the time matching funds are enough to keep the publicly funded candidate viable in the race.

### **What happens when PACs or other special interest groups spend money to promote a candidate? Doesn't that undermine the intent of Clean Elections?**

No. Everyone has a right to be heard during an election, and many groups spend money to weigh in on a race when there is a candidate they particularly support or oppose.

These are independent expenditures that are made without the knowledge or consent of candidates, and in Maine, the cost of these expenditures is reported. Independent expenditures are put into the calculation for matching funds, so that Clean Election candidates have the ability to respond to whatever messages are put out against them or in support of their opponent.

**What about the other candidates? It doesn't seem fair that they wouldn't get money if some group ran ads against them.**

Privately funded candidates have no spending limit, so they can keep raising more money if they need to respond to independent expenditures. Candidates understand that to benefit from matching funds, they must first qualify for Clean Elections and agree to limit their spending. Not every candidate wants to do that.

**Why doesn't Maine insist that every candidate use Clean Elections?**

A lot of people ask that question! It would be unconstitutional to require candidates to use Clean Elections because the system involves a spending limit. The courts have said that candidates have a Constitutional right to spend as much money as they want, and only in the context of a voluntary system may a spending limit be imposed.

**What good is it if some elected officials are still beholden to special interests?**

Maine has campaign finance regulations for privately funded candidates, too. For example, these candidates may accept only a limited amount of money from any one donor. Lobbyists may not make campaign contributions while the Legislature is in session. All private donations of \$50 or more are reported on campaign finance reports so that the public can see who is giving money to candidates. Most states have laws like this to guard against corruption and undue influence. Maine's Clean Election system reduces the influence of lobbyists and their clients on campaigns and elected officials.

**What can I do to make sure we always have a Clean Election option for candidates?**

Great question! First, join Maine Citizens for Clean Elections! It doesn't cost a dime to join our mailing list. We'll send you a newsletter and email updates so you know what issues are coming up and what actions to take. We welcome your donation, too!

Second, participate in the system. Ask candidates to use the system, and offer to make a \$5 Qualifying Contribution to the ones you support. Volunteer on the campaigns of those candidates, too. Check "Yes" for Clean Elections on your Maine income tax form.

Third, let others know how important this is. Forward MCCE's emails to your friends and colleagues. Write letters to the editor. Invite MCCE to do a presentation to your local club or community group – or ask for our DVD and present it yourself! Host a house party to raise awareness and funds so that MCCE can continue to be on the front lines.