

Clean Election Candidates on the Rise

Written by Lorie Costigan—Statehouse News Service

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AUGUSTA — John Richardson, a Democrat seeking his party's gubernatorial nomination in the June 2010 primary, is the newest candidate to announce he'll run as a Clean Election candidate.

He enters the most crowded Maine gubernatorial primary to date. Twenty-two contenders — eight of whom are seeking public cash through the Maine Clean Election Fund — want keys to the Blaine House. In addition, 47 legislative candidates hope to gain office with the help of the publicly financed Clean Election Fund and are willing to commit to spending and fund-raising caps to run on the public's dime instead of corporate dollars.

The use of Clean Election funds has increased since the law was enacted in 1996. In 2008, 81 percent of those running for the Maine legislature ran publicly funded campaigns. By comparison, 33 percent of all candidates in 2000 ran as Clean Election candidates.

All the same, taxpayer interest in funding the Clean Election Fund appears to be waning. In 2008, a total of 22,033 taxpayers donated \$66,099 to the Clean Election Fund in annual tax filings, down from 66,900 taxpayers donating \$194,970 in 2007 and the all-time high of nearly 100,000 taxpayers donating a total of \$289,110 in 1998.