

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Date: OCTOBER 26TH, 2004

Maine Citizen Leadership Fund Contact
Jon Bartholomew, 207.780.8657 x5
Arn Pearson, 207.232.4870

PRESS RELEASE

VOTERS IN MAINE WILL NOT BE “FLORIDATED”

In Maine, Every Vote Counts, and Every Vote will be Counted

Portland, ME – Citizen groups and attorneys today urged Maine’s voters to know their voting rights for this year’s election. While national press has focused on voting problems in Florida, Nevada, Ohio and Oregon, voters in Maine could experience problems at the polls as well. To minimize the possibility of problems, voters need to know their rights, their duties, and what to do if they think their rights have been violated.

This is a special year for elections in Maine. Maine might have the highest voter turnout in the nation. There are important issues for Mainers to vote on that will affect everyone. Control of the state legislature will be determined in close races. Furthermore, Maine’s four electoral votes could determine the outcome of the presidential election, and the polls show the race to be close in Maine.

Ann Luther, President of the League of Women Voters of Maine stated, "When you vote in Maine, it counts! Whether it's the Tax Cap initiative, the Bear Baiting initiative, the Presidential election, or the race for County Commissioner, there are questions on the ballot that matter to Maine families and communities. Maine voters should get counted and have their say on the issues that matter most to them. We want people to know that in Maine, we have high-quality elections, that all votes are counted, and that it doesn't matter who you are or where you live – all votes count the same."

Mainers experienced problems with voter intimidation in 2002, prompting a new law designed to reduce frivolous ballot challenges. Today, those who challenge a ballot must claim to know specific information about the person casting a ballot, and they must do so under oath. Even though action was taken to fix one problem, other issues may arise this year.

There have been reports that election clerks in Maine did not know when the deadline was to accept voter registration cards from registration drives. There have been reports of voter registration forms being rejected because the registrant did not check the box for new registration. There may yet be other problems related to lack of communication, errors on registration forms, or poorly organized voter registration drives by private organizations.

There has been an unprecedented effort to register voters and get people to vote early, some by organizations from away, so the chance of errors made in the registration process could be greater than usual. Therefore, all Mainers are urged to know their voting rights and duties so Maine can be sure of as few problems as possible and have the cleanest elections in the nation.

“We are a coalition of non-partisan organizations who have come together to make sure everyone votes and every vote is counted,” noted Portland attorney Terry Garney. “The last election made us all aware of how precious each vote is. We want to make sure that no matter what the outcome of this election, each Maine voter will know that his or her precious vote was counted in the town halls, and not in the courts.”

“Maine has some of the most extensive voter rights in the nation,” said Gisele Nadeau, President of the Maine Trial Lawyers Association. “We have Election Day voter registration, homeless people and citizens with felony convictions may vote, and voters may request an absentee ballot for any reason. Here are some important rights to remember: If you are told you aren’t registered and you don’t have identification, you can still register and cast a ‘challenged ballot’; you may vote right now at your town or city hall; and if you are in line when the polls close, you can still register and vote.”

The organizations provided lists (attached) of voting rights, voting duties, and tips to ensure your vote will be counted.

“Along with rights, voters also have responsibilities,” reminded Arn Pearson of the Maine Citizen Leadership Fund. “Voters must fill out the registration form completely, bring proof of identity and residency if you are registering at the polls, and check with your town clerk’s office if you are unsure if you are registered to vote. If voting by absentee, put 60 cents on it and mail it early enough so it will be at the town clerk’s office on Tuesday, November 2nd. And of course voters should educate themselves about the issues and candidates they will be voting on.”

“Hopefully the problems experienced in Maine in 2002 have been fixed,” remarked Michael Sylvester of Common Cause Maine. “However, just in case, there are people and organizations prepared to help. The Secretary of State’s office in Augusta is ready to help voters. Voters may find lawyers at their polling place who will be helping anyone who feels their right to vote has been infringed. If voters have concerns about their rights, be they Republican, Democrat, Green or independent, they may call 1-866-OUR VOTE and speak to an attorney knowledgeable about Maine election law. We will make sure Maine has the cleanest elections in the nation. In Maine, Every Vote Counts, and Every Vote Will Be Counted.”

Voters are urged to call 1-866-OUR-VOTE to speak to an expert on Maine election law. This phone number has been set up by People for the American Way which is a coalition of non-partisan non-profit organizations.

Lists of your voting rights, voting duties and tips to make sure your vote is counted can be found online at www.maineclipselections.org.

Attached: bullet points of voting rights in Maine, voting duties and ways to avoid making common mistakes.

###