

Don't forget the tax form's Clean Election Fund check off

Editorials

One choice at tax time can mean more choices for voters on Election Day.
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— As the April 15 tax deadline looms, Mainers have an opportunity to do something that will make a difference on Nov. 4.

A simple check in a box on your tax return tells the state to direct \$3 to the Maine Clean Election Fund, which is used to finance the campaigns of qualified candidates for state offices.

Choosing to check the box will not increase your tax bill or reduce your refund check. It will make it more likely that voters around the state will have a choice of candidates when they go to the polls this year.

Since 2000, the Clean Election Fund has provided public financing to candidates for the state Legislature and governor.

In order to qualify, candidates have to show support by gathering a number of \$5 donations. People running for House seats must collect 50 contributions, the Senate 150, governor 2,500. Once approved, the candidates promise not to spend any outside money, including their own.

Their campaign budget is based on the previous spending history in their district, but they are eligible for additional funds if they are outspent by a privately funded opponent.

The system has had some failures, including candidates who were caught misusing funds. But for the most part, it has been a success.

Nothing can completely wipe out the advantage that comes with access to money, but this system guarantees that even those without it have a chance to be heard.

And knowing that they won't have to spend all their time raising funds or risk putting themselves deep in debt to finance a campaign gives more people the courage to run for office.

It's something we all benefit from, and it begins with a little check.