



Publicly funded elections improve democracy

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Maine's trailblazing clean elections policy is a model for the entire nation.

The 2008 presidential election was one of the most expensive campaigns in American history.

Both candidates advocated change, and many Americans voted not only for change in policies, but change in how business is conducted in Washington D.C. One fundamental way to bring change to our politics in the nation's capital is to follow the lead of Maine citizens, and enact a system of voluntary public funding for all federal elections.

The clean elections law approved by Maine voters a decade ago for statewide offices has proven effective and is a model for federal efforts currently under consideration. Maine's representatives in Washington are poised to play a significant role as debate over electoral reform gets under way in Congress next year.

We urge Maine's congressional delegation to support needed reform to the way our national leaders are elected.

As elected officials, we have been privileged to represent the citizens of our great state in the Maine Legislature, and were elected using the clean elections system. Participation in the clean elections system is high, as more than 80 percent of current state legislators used clean elections to get elected. Clean elections has earned the confidence of Mainers; when Maine voters were asked in a recent poll whether candidates for governor should use clean elections, 82 percent said yes, with 61 percent saying they were more likely to vote for candidates who used it.

We strongly support Maine's clean elections system. We're able to spend our time talking with constituents, working on their behalf instead of spending our time fund-raising for re-election. In addition, the Maine clean elections system curbs the influence of special interests in the legislative process, ensuring that elected officials will answer to voters, not big donors. We believe that our experience with public funding of elections in Maine provides much to recommend to national policymakers.

Mainers now have an opportunity to play a critical role in bringing Maine's public campaign funding success nationwide. The Fair Elections Now Act put forward by Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., and Arlen Specter, R-Penn., would ensure qualifying candidates could run for office without regard for their ability to raise large amounts of money.

Similar legislation has been introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives by Rep. John Larson, D-Conn., and Walter Jones, R-N.C., to enable our senators and representatives to spend more time doing the work of public service, rather than constantly raising money for the next election cycle.

Best of all, the proposed federal system embodies many of the positive reforms of Maine's clean elections system. As a result of increasing bipartisan support in Congress and strong support from voters across the nation, the opportunity to reform our election system through the adoption of public funding of federal elections in 2009 is a real prospect.

We need to change how we elect our leaders to reclaim our democracy. We strongly endorse the Fair Elections Now Act. Maine voters should contact their senators and representatives and ask them to support this critical reform of our election process.

Maine has been a national leader on election reform and can lead the way once again.

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