

# BANGOR DAILY NEWS

## First stop for clean elections

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**By Pat LaMarche**

Two events are scheduled tomorrow to mark the 10th anniversary of Maine's allegedly clean elections. First of all, from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. at the Maine Historical Society Lecture Hall on Congress Street in Portland, there will be a panel discussion moderated by former Gov. Angus King.

Judging from the e-fliers that littered my inbox, the event emphasizes that "on the road to fair elections," Maine was and is the "first stop." That's like saying that on the road from Bangor to Los Angeles, Hampden's the first stop.

The second part of the celebration, hailed as the "main event," is at the Portland City Music Hall and it costs \$35 to attend. You can purchase tickets online at [www.maineclipselections.org](http://www.maineclipselections.org). I wonder if there are scholarships for people who want to attend but can't afford to go. It seems ironic that the celebration of free elections cost seven times the amount of a qualifying contribution.

But clean elections is nothing if not ironic. For instance, former Gov. Angus King is the emcee, and he never ran clean. In fact, he poured gobs of money into his elections, much of it his own.

But I'm not tarring the governor for not running clean because he couldn't: The law didn't exist when he was a candidate. It was, however, passed while he was in the Blaine House, so I'm sure it's fitting that he officiate. And the beloved former governor will charm the audience, which is always a good thing during a celebration.

No, Angus King moderating is ironic for a much more important reason than whether or not he accepted or used influence-bearing funds to finance his own campaigns. He stands out because he was elected governor as an unenrolled candidate. And Maine currently has 366,821 unenrolled voters.

One of the fishy things about the clean elections process is the makeup of the Ethics Commission. That's not to say the individuals appointed to the commission are suspect, but the major party dominance on the commission is disproportional and unfair. The commission has two Democrats, two Republicans and one independent. With 37 percent of the voters rejecting enrollment in either party and a 3 percent being Green Independent Party members, there should be four independents and three each of the other guys — or to keep the commission more at workable size — three, two and two.

This is important because the Ethics Commission rules on what's fair and not fair under Maine's Clean Elections Act. And when the commission isn't apportioned fairly, well you see how things could just get complicated. And when candidates appear before them to cry foul on the major parties — as we did in 2006 — it's hard to wonder which is more important, protecting clean elections or the party loyalties that got the commissioners appointed in the first place.

Now, the majority of tomorrow's merrymakers are delightful folks such as co-host and former Senate President Beth Edmonds, who ran with clean funds and worked diligently to represent her constituents. She'll no doubt celebrate the leveled playing field clean elections provided her — an average working person.

But last year, when representatives from a group in Connecticut asked me to come tell them how wonderful I thought clean elections worked in Maine, I told them “no.” The major parties have gamed the system so that they remain in charge.

For example, in 2006 the Democratic and Republican Governors Associations poured millions into the state with no regard or respect for the clean elections process. Neither candidate receiving the support refused the help. And the lopsided Ethics Commission gave them a pass.

Since then the Maine Legislature — filled almost to the brim with “clean” candidates — passed laws to prohibit outsider participation in a “clean” governor's race by passing irrelevant seed money rules and other restrictions. All the while keeping the loophole for “leadership” PACs so that they could continue taking private money.

If the governor's race of 2010 has taught us anything, it's that first and foremost Maine needs a runoff system.

And that's the best thing about Angus King officiating. He's the last governor to be elected by a majority of the voters: Proportional representation and majority support are where clean really begins.

**Pat LaMarche** of Yarmouth is the author of “Left Out In America: The State of Homelessness in the United States.” She may be reached at [PatLaMarche@hotmail.com](mailto:PatLaMarche@hotmail.com).

A limited number of free tickets are available for tomorrow's clean election celebration. See [www.maineCLElections.org](http://www.maineCLElections.org) for information.