

BANGOR DAILY NEWS

A Clean Victory

EDITORIAL

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If there is one thing upon which most Americans can agree in these days after the 2010 electoral season, it is that the influence of money in campaigns is more powerful than ever. Some may even view it as a contaminating force threatening the foundations of our democratic system.

Clearly, it is time for some brave members of Congress to take another run at putting a kink in the hose that waters campaigns. A few good men or women in each party who do not plan to seek re-election should commit to crafting a law that limits spending on elections. A fix is critical.

One redoubt in the battle to hold back the tide of money on the state level was reinforced when the U.S. Supreme Court turned down a request for an injunction seeking to block Maine's clean election matching fund system. The lawsuit, filed by Republican state Rep. Andre Cushing of Hampden with the help of the James Madison Center for Free Speech and the Maine Heritage Policy Center, sought to eliminate the matching funds and the \$750 limit state law put on individual and corporate donors to gubernatorial campaigns. The Oct. 22 high court's ruling in *Cushing v. McKee* put an end — for this election cycle, anyway — to the attempt to gut Maine's clean election law.

But more battles are expected. Though two high court justices refused to grant the injunction (Justices Stephen Breyer and Anthony Kennedy), two others indicated they would have ruled in favor of the plaintiff if the full case came before them (Justices Antonin Scalia and Samuel Alito). The case proceeds at the lower federal court level.

Meanwhile, the unprecedented expenditures in six Maine Senate races by the Arlington, Va.-based Republican State Leadership-Maine PAC prompted a complaint from the Maine Democratic Party. The Democrats claim the PAC has not met filing deadlines in an attempt to deny Democratic candidates time and matching funds to respond. The state Ethics Commission agreed, but put off a decision on a penalty.

Though these local developments aren't directly linked to the Supreme Court's landmark *Citizens United v. FEC* ruling, which granted corporations the same right to unlimited electoral spending on advertisements that individuals enjoy, the trends are clear.

Ideally, candidates seek to persuade voters. They have and will continue to pander and prevaricate to win support. But when the means to winning votes is first to win financial backing, a hidden layer between candidate and electorate is created. No one knows what promises have been exacted from candidates, stated or implied, when elections are awash with money. Beyond this, donors align with general philosophies, liberal or conservative, knowing what they will get if their side wins. So, elections are often decided by those with the most money to spend, not by those with the best ideas.

A sweeping law or ruling is not likely to resolve the issue. The fight must continue at many levels. But money must not be the currency of our electoral process.