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Most Legislative candidates qualify for public financing They gather enough \$5 contributions

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About four of five candidates for the Legislature who sought public financing have been approved to receive the funds.

The Maine Commission on Governmental Ethics and Election Practices said that, of 334 candidates running in uncontested and contested June 8 primaries for the Maine House or Senate, 265 submitted the required number of \$5 qualifying contributions and swore off private funding.

A publicly financed House candidate needs to collect 60 contributions from voters in their district; a Senate candidate needs to collect 175.

Forty-four more candidates had applications pending late Wednesday. All these likely will qualify, according to state officials.

"There are a number of administrative reasons why their certifications have yet to be finalized," said Paul Lavin, assistant director of the commission.

Only about 25 candidates who intended to run as Clean Election candidates failed to submit their signatures, or changed their minds and told the commission they would run a traditionally financed campaign.

Matthew Boucher of Ellsworth, a Republican running for House District 38, had 61 or more contributions that may have qualified, had he not been about a half hour late submitting them.

He's appealed the commission's denial of his application, and has a hearing Thursday afternoon in Augusta.

Another candidate, Terry Morrison of South Portland, a Democrat running to represent House District 122, brought only 59 contributions to the commission one day before the April 21 deadline. He needed 60.

Gavin O'Brien of the ethics commission said most of the 44 candidates who submitted applications but are yet uncertified had raised seed money -- a maximum of \$500 for House candidates and \$1,500 for Senate -- they probably wanted to spend before submitting their required reports.

The amount of money the Clean Elections fund pays candidates is reduced by the balance of their seed money when they submit this report. This money, Lavin said, is intended to help candidates collect the qualifying contributions.

Certification of other candidates likely hinged on their failure to appoint a campaign treasurer other than themselves, failure to submit an alphabetical list of contributing supporters, or a failure to have contributions made in the form of money orders signed, Lavin said.

All candidates who receive public financing receive additional funds if they are running in a contested primary, and have an opportunity for more to match fundraising efforts of privately financed opponents.

Although commission members were concerned the fund might be short given the demand of legislative and gubernatorial races, that worry is gone.

"At this point, there is no scenario where there would be a shortfall in the Clean Elections fund for the 2010 elections," Lavin said.

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