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## Glut of Candidates Threatens to Drain Maine Clean Election Fund

01/05/2010 05:50 PM ET Reported By: [A.J. Higgins](#)

**The list of candidates for governor continues to grow. The latest to enter the race is former state Conservation Commissioner Patrick McGowan. A Democrat, McGowan has also chosen to run as a publicly-financed candidate which brings the total number of Maine Clean Election gubernatorial candidates to nine. There are increasing concerns that the state's \$10 million Clean Election fund could be in trouble.**

Speaking to supporters at the Whig and Courier Pub in Bangor, McGowan's campaign pivots on jobs and prosperity which he says is within the grasp of all Mainers.

"My life experience has given me the tools to create the new prosperity that our people so desperately need," McGowan said. "That new prosperity starts with new jobs. I know what Mainers need from their government, and over the next few years, they want us to hold the line on taxes, and they want us to help businesses create new jobs. Small businesses are the engine of the Maine economy, and as governor, I will work to help those businesses grow."

But McGowan and other Democrats are wondering whether the prosperity that they envision for others will be available to them and their campaigns. McGowan and two other Democrats are planning to run as taxpayer-financed candidates under the Maine Clean Election Act.

Primary candidates are entitled to \$400,000 dollars each after privately raising \$40,000 in seed money. They're also entitled to up to \$200,000 in matching money to offset spending by privately-funded candidates. When a Republican Clean Election candidate is rolled into the mix, the costs of the gubernatorial primaries could easily exceed \$2.5 million dollars.

Legislative candidates are also expected to subtract about \$3 million from the \$10 million fund, but that figure could go higher. What's left would go to publicly-funded gubernatorial candidates remaining in the race.

McGowan says the people of Maine voted for publicly-financed campaigns and the Legislature should provide the money that's needed. "And that's something that the people voted overwhelmingly for, and I think that the money will be there," he says. "I think that the commitment is there from the Legislature and the executive branch to fund a system that is in fact a model for most of the country."

"As far as not having enough money, that's a policy decision that's been made by the Legislature," says Former Economic and Community Development Commissioner John Richardson, who is also running as a Democrat for governor under the Clean Election Act. He says lawmakers need to pay up.

"I was in the Legislature and one of the leaders in the Legislature for a time, and I recall that we made sure that we held that trust fund harmless, and we made sure there was enough in there, so that all of the candidates that were under consideration could run," he says. "That's, I think, the responsibility of this Legislature, to make sure that these candidates, including myself, have enough money to run."

But State Sen. Bill Diamond, a Windham Democrat who co-chairs the Legislature's Appropriations Committee, says there's no way he can envision more money being pumped into the Clean Election Fund as lawmakers struggle to close a current budget gap of nearly \$440 million.

Rosa Scarcelli, a privately-funded Democratic candidate for governor agrees that now is not the time to ask taxpayers to cut services for political campaigns. "We can't be taking money away from schools or nursing homes or other essential programs," she says. "We're facing a severe budget cut, and the Legislature's going back into session now to grapple with this, and to take taxpayer money for a political campaign -- I just couldn't do it."

Members of the Commission on Governmental Ethics and Election Practices are scheduled to meet at the end of the month to determine how the available public election funds will be carved up.