

Portland Press Herald Maine Sunday Telegram

Shortage unlikely event for Clean Election Fund

Most of the candidates who want public funding will not be able to qualify for it.

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The thing to remember about worst-case scenarios is that they are just that. They are not someone's best bet on what's most likely to happen or even a good guess. They are the worst thing that could take place and so provide helpful boundaries for planners.

As executive director of the Maine Commission on Governmental Ethics and Election Practices, and the man in charge of the state's Clean Election Fund, Jonathan Wayne is paid to look at worst-case scenarios.

When he sees the field of 21 announced candidates for governor and the number of them who say they will try to run with public financing, it is right for him to be concerned about what would happen if so many qualify that there won't be enough money to go around. He should be coming up with a plan for distributing insufficient funds.

But it doesn't make sense for the rest of us to worry about it too much.

What the worst-case analysis fails to account for is that even though a lot of people are running for governor, that doesn't mean that a lot of them will qualify for public financing.

There have never been more than a couple of "clean" gubernatorial candidates in the same cycle and there probably won't be more than two or three this time.

That's because it's always been difficult to qualify for public financing, and changes made to the law last year will make it even harder this year.

A gubernatorial candidate would have to start by collecting a minimum of \$40,000 in seed money from in-state donors, with contributions capped at \$100 apiece. Then he or she would have to get \$5 donation checks made out to the Clean Election Fund from 3,250 donors by April 1. Some will make the deadline, but not many.

The Clean Election Fund is not in as much trouble as has been reported. And it won't be unless the worst-case scenario really becomes a reality.

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