

JOURNAL TRIBUNE

EDITORIAL

Supporting Clean Election fund keeps politics fair

Friday, March 18, 2011

Maine's Clean Election system has dedicated opponents, so we hope supporters won't neglect an important vote of support this tax season. Taxpayers can help preserve the system by checking the first box on their 1040ME tax form.

Marking "Yes" on the form will designate a \$3 contribution to the Maine Clean Election Fund. It neither adds to your tax bill nor reduces your refund, and it sends a clear message of support for this successful system.

In the last election, 80 percent of successful legislative candidates used clean elections funding. And although Democrats overall are somewhat more inclined to run Clean Election campaigns, 94 percent of Republicans who ran for state Senate were Clean Election candidates. The statistical evidence of the last decade shows strong support for the system from Maine's diverse candidates.

Opposition comes from all points on the political spectrum as well. But the critics don't give the Clean Election system the credit it deserves for promoting the robust political campaigns that are essential to good government. The fund supports legislative candidates who can't afford to bankroll their own campaigns, and aren't inclined to court special interest donors. It also opens the door to new candidates.

Whether or not corporate campaign contributions are an essential free speech right, they are not restrained by this system. Public financing levels the playing field, giving equal voice to those who accept special-interest donations and those who don't.

According to Maine Citizens for Clean Elections, the fund needs taxpayer support to put money in the bank for the 2012 election season. The tax form check-off is also a referendum on public support for the system, which faces continuing challenges.

A bill seeking to abolish the Clean Election system has been referred to the Legislature's Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee. Among other proposed cutbacks are a bill seeking to end support for gubernatorial candidates, and one calling for an end to support for candidates in uncontested primary races. Public financing of campaigns is also facing challenges in federal and Maine courts.

With both legislative and legal challenges ahead, supporters should not overlook the opportunity to register a vote of support on their state income tax form.

— *Nick Cowenhoven*

• • •