

Sun Journal

We don't need more money to select governor

Editorial

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When the people speak, they have the final word.

That's why the Maine Legislature has been wary of repealing or significantly altering laws approved by Maine's voters in statewide referendums.

This Legislature, however, is on the verge of approving a measure that would give a significant advantage to the current governor in raising money for his next election bid.

Last week, late in the session, an unrelated bill was amended by the House that would double the maximum individual campaign contribution allowed to be received by privately funded gubernatorial candidates.

This would not only abandon the limits set by voters, it would give another big advantage to candidates who ditch Clean-Election funding entirely.

Since incumbents have a huge fund-raising advantage, this change seems intended to help Gov. Paul LePage raise more money for his second term.

The very idea of publicly funded elections is under attack this year. Two bills have been submitted that would repeal the Clean-Election process entirely.

Wisely, both have been tabled for the moment.

Frustrated in that effort, however, Clean-Election opponents are trying a new tactic to weaken the law.

Sen. Debra Plowman, R-Hampden, succeeded last week in passing an amendment that would increase the maximum individual contribution for governor for an election cycle from \$1,500 to \$3,000.

Her surprise amendment was added to a completely different bill increasing the limits for county races.

We see three problems here:

First, the sudden, late-session amendment will have received no public hearing as required for such major initiatives.

There was absolutely no testimony on why this increase is necessary and no opportunity for opponents to make their case to legislators and the public.

Second, the amendment would defy the will of the people expressed clearly in 1996 when the Clean Election Law was approved at the polls.

The limit then was set at \$500 per election, or \$1,000 for the primary and general election.

Clearly, times have changed and elections have become more expensive. Adjusted for inflation, \$500 in 1996 would be the equivalent of about \$687 today.

However, the Legislature made that commonsense adjustment two years ago, increasing the maximum from \$500 to \$750, more than compensating for inflation.

After only two years, Plowman's amendment would now double that already higher amount.

This all comes two years after the Legislature made things much tougher for candidates to obtain public funding, requiring them to obtain many more small contributions in order to show they are viable contenders.

Now Plowman would have us turn around and make it much easier for privately funded candidates to raise even larger sums.

Third, just a year ago, we were all griping about the incessant TV ads and countless debates leading up to the general election.

Money from private sources and out-of-state PACS flooded into the state, polluting the airwaves with lies and unfair attack ads.

Do we really need to inject even more money into this process?

No. The Maine House should quickly reject any effort to double campaign contributions in gubernatorial races.