

Voices of the people

Friday, January 21, 2011

Recently, Gov. Paul LePage stated that he would not attend the Martin Luther King Jr. Day celebration in Portland because the NAACP was a special interest group.

Is there something wrong with being a special interest group? Our state is blessedly filled with special interest groups — Mainers who care deeply about issues that affect our state.

For instance, groups like The American Cancer Society, The Sportsman's Alliance of Maine, the Natural Resources Council, the Maine Snowmobile Association are all special interest groups representing issues of concern to Mainers.

Gov. LePage offers access to groups like the Maine Chamber of Commerce and the Maine Hospital Association. These organizations are good and valuable in their work for the state of Maine. They too are special interest groups.

As an elected official, Gov. LePage and all others in government need to be open to hearing from all Mainers on issues that are important to them.

Elected officials like governors and legislators have no other way of knowing all the issues that of concern to their constituents. Average citizens do not have the time to leave work and go to Augusta to testify at committee hearings. "Special interest" groups are there to represent those citizens' concerns.

We have been very fortunate in Maine to have passed the Clean Elections law since this ensures that undue influence by any group is removed from the election process. Groups are not able to give financial donations to a candidate who chooses to be funded through the Clean Elections system.

Once the campaigns are over, however, all groups have the right and responsibility to educate elected officials about the concerns of their members.

These are human interests, not "special" interests. We should be grateful that we have so many citizens who are willing to spend their time and money to advocate for what they believe. Our state is better for this.

I hope that our governor will see it as his responsibility to meet with all groups that represent the interests of Maine people.

Beth Edmonds of Freeport served as Maine Senate president from 2004 to 2007.