

# State of Maine

## Outside money steamrolling Maine

By Jill Goldthwait

Okay, everybody, you know the drill. Nov. 6 is Election Day and if you don't vote, you lose your right to complain for the next year.

You can still register to vote if you need to, and if you just remembered you are off to visit Aunt Philomela next week, you can still vote with an absentee ballot.

Your town clerk is the font of knowledge for all things election, so if you need help with what to do and how to do it, that's who to call.

In his weekly radio address, Governor Paul LePage issued a call for civility in the political process, a call we should ardently support. "We must learn to debate the issues with civility and integrity," said the governor. Never mind that he himself has a black belt in incivility. It is never too late to turn over a new leaf and if the governor has grown beyond his testiness to become a kinder, gentler chief executive, it is a transformation we would welcome.

After all, the governor said, "I like to think the mistakes and mishaps of the past will not be repeated," and though he was talking of history in general and not his personal history, we can still hope.

As for the tenor of the election campaigns, the governor was right on the money. Accusations, allegations, condemnations and obfuscations are flying thick and fast, none of them helping beleaguered voters figure out who they think might be the best president, senator, congressman or state legislator.

It may be oh-so-tempting to throw up your hands and sit this one out. Don't do it.

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It's not too late to grab your local paper and read those interviews with candidates, or go to [maine.gov](http://maine.gov) to find out about the bonds and other questions on the ballot.

Here's the good news. Next week at this time it all will be over. All over but the suing, anyway. In addition to the usual feigned outrage that thickens the air in campaign season, a slew of ethics complaints and lawsuits have been threatened or filed in campaigns in Maine and around the country.

Political Action Committees (PACs) and their uniquely privileged status have been at the root of many allegations of foul play. So-called Super-Pacs are the big spenders, pouring money not only into the presidential campaign, where billions of dollars are being spent to win the highest

office in the country, but into myriad local races as well.

Thanks to the Supreme Court's supremely short-sighted decision, Super-Pacs can amass unlimited amounts of money and are not obligated to disclose the sources. Though disclosure would seem to be a basic tenet of democracy, it may not matter so much. If millions of dollars are being poured into a campaign, you can be sure someone wants something in return for their money. Whoever is giving it, there is every chance that their interests are going to take priority over yours.

The powers (and wallets) behind the PACs would like to be able to dictate their priorities to the president, the United States Congress, and to every state legislature in the country, and they are more than willing to pay for the privilege. To the extent they are successful, we will have a government beholden to people with more discretionary income than Vacationlanders will ever see, and an agenda that may or may not be in the best interests of the country as a whole. Hint: "may not be" is the most likely.

Out-of-state spending on Maine's U.S. Senate race is over \$4 million. For the state legislature, it is creeping toward \$3 million. Perhaps we

should be flattered that high rollers outside our state are taking such an interest in us. Or not. Remember, they expect something for their money, and that "something" is not economic development, health care or good schools for Maine.

The massive influx of out-of-state money into Maine campaigns has exceeded the ability of many candidates to respond to negative ads. Though ads bought by national interests may contain distortions or outright lies, they can sure start a lot of talk.

Candidate spending is also rising in Maine. The Maine Clean Elections program determines disbursements to candidates based on the average of previous campaign expenditures. For this year, that is just over \$20,000. The David and Goliath race is in Senate District 11, where Clean Elections candidate Dick Woodbury (Independent), capped at the \$20,000, is opposed by Republican Chris Tyll, who has reported campaign expenditures of over \$72,000 so far.

As candidates desperately seek any toehold they can find, complaints abound of inappropriate expenditures, improper relationships to PACs, violations of advertising requirements and missing data on financial reports. Some of these are howls in the night, while others are formal complaints filed with the Ethics Commission.

All in all, campaigning has become an ugly business. Dirigo? Not so much. We are becoming just another state where elections are all about money, and we are being rolled by out-of-state interests. What's Latin for "I do as I'm told?"

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