

# JOURNAL TRIBUNE

EDITORIAL

## Support of Clean Elections is good for Maine politics

Wednesday, October 31, 2012

Super PAC and PAC funds flooding this election cycle has been well-covered this year, but what has not garnered as much attention is the spending in Maine's legislative races.

Maine Citizens for Clean Elections released a report Friday showing that spending is on the rise – and it's rising quickly.

The findings, detailed in the "Preliminary Report on 2012 Campaign Money: Private Money Making A Comeback In Maine Elections," show private spending is increasing at a rapid rate compared with past election years, while the rate of participation in the clean election system is declining.

A major blow was dealt to Maine's Clean Elections Act in 2011 when the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a provision of Arizona's clean election bill – which was modeled after Maine's law – allowing for matching funds for legislative candidates using clean election funding. Despite efforts by MCCE and the Maine ethics commission to propose a "requalifying/tiered" option, which would allow candidates to qualify for additional funds without matching dollar for dollar, the Maine Legislature declined to implement the change.

The result is a weaker system and now a loss of participation. Participation has dropped from 80 to 65 percent this year – a level not seen since 2002, according to MCCE.

This change is leading to more money being spent – much more, in fact.

In one local race, \$23,734 has been spent, compared to \$3,873 in 2010, according to October campaign spending reports analyzed by MCCE. The race between Democrat Joseph Wagner and Republican Aaron Libby, both of whom are privately financed, for House District 139, which consists of part of Lyman and Waterboro, is proving to be costly. Five times what was spent the last time around has been doled out, as of the latest reporting deadline.

And to our south, in House District 148, covering part of South Berwick and Eliot, \$27,866 was spent compared to just \$3,973 spent in 2010, in the race between Democrat Roberta Beavers, a Clean Election candidate, and Republican Sarah Lewin, who is privately financed.

In one state senate race, more than \$300,000 has been spent, according to Andrew Bossie, executive director of MCCE.

All of this money is drowning out the political discourse and keeping those who are not independently wealthy – or incredible fundraisers – from running effective campaigns.

The change in campaign financing laws at the national and state level are having dramatic and devastating effects on the election system and the democratic process. It's been unfortunate to see the funds from out of state flooding the race for U.S. senate – with the three main contenders, Cynthia Dill, Angus King and Charlie Summers getting ads either for or against their campaigns without their knowledge or consent.

In one instance, Maine Freedom, a political action committee registered in Washington with Republican connections, paid for a television ad supporting Dill. The thought behind the move is that more votes for Dill would mean fewer for King, which is good for Summers.

That kind of rationale is cynical and unwarranted. Maine people and U.S. voters should be presented with facts and opportunities to speak with their candidates to get information, not a barrage of misleading TV spots trying to smear candidates.

Clean elections need to be strengthened and restored in Maine – the first step to bettering our political system and those who represent us in Augusta and Washington.

• • •

*Today's editorial was written by City Editor Robyn Burnham representing the majority opinion of the Journal Tribune Editorial Board. Questions? Comments? Contact Managing Editor Kristen Schulze Muszynski by calling 282-1535, Ext. 322, or via email at [kristenm@journaltribune.com](mailto:kristenm@journaltribune.com).*