

Level playing field is point of Clean Elections system

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The recent Maine Compass by House majority leader Andre Cushing, "Lawmakers chose least expensive revision to Clean Election system," didn't quite make sense.



He starts by defending the "traditional" form of political fundraising and ends by criticizing someone for using it.

Cushing, a leader of the effort to weaken Maine's Clean Election law, succeeded in stopping participating candidates from getting matching dollars if and when an opponent raises additional private dollars. This un-levels the playing field, and a level playing field is the whole point of Clean Elections.

He starts by saying that those opponents "will finance their races the traditional way -- by earning people's support, both their vote and their financial backing." He calls this "a cornerstone of elections since the founding of our republic," and calls Clean Elections funding "welfare for politicians."

Later, however, he complains that one private citizen, investor Donald Sussman (who supports the nonprofit I work for) did exactly that, writing: "In Maine, donations to political action committees are unlimited, and Sussman has taken full advantage of this."

Yet the party Cushing helps lead takes full advantage of PAC support and is against restricting them.

Cushing seems to be saying that "traditional" giving is good -- as long as you don't give a lot. By making it harder to be a Clean Election candidate, however, he's encouraging more big donors and special interests to do just that.

He also fails to note that Sussman is one of the small minority of "big-time" donors who support the candidates fighting for campaign finance reform.

Cushing concludes: "As for outside money, that has never stopped."

Leaving us to wonder: Does he really want it to?

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