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Letters to the editor, March 29, 2012

Clean Elections is about challengers not incumbents

In an opinion article published last week, Maine House Speaker Robert Nutting made a series of guesses about the intent of Maine voters in 1996 when they instituted Clean Elections.

He offers no justification for this re-interpretation of voter intent almost two decades later.

In 1996, the people supported the creation of Clean Elections, and last week Speaker Nutting led the Republican legislature to significantly undermine the program.

Maine people voted to limit the influence of special interests on our campaigns and to level the playing field for regular Maine people, including small-business owners, teachers and farmers to represent their neighbors in state government.

Clean Elections was intended to allow any Maine voter to make a case to her neighbors for why she could best represent their district, regardless of her personal financial circumstances and social network.

Speaker Nutting points out that I ran a traditionally-funded campaign in my last election.

I raised \$1,105.

I do not know why the speaker chose to list six incumbents who ran traditionally-funded campaigns, but I do think he misses the point.

Clean Elections is not about incumbents, but about the ability of any Mainer to challenge an incumbent if she thinks her representative is doing a bad job.

Democracy in Maine works best when elected representatives remain on their toes.

And for 15 years Maine democracy has worked well, and incumbents ignored challengers at their peril.

Mainers voted for a strong public finance law to give any citizen willing to work hard enough a chance to run for office, not simply professional politicians and those with deep pockets.

*Rep. Mike Carey
Lewiston*