

Portland Press Herald

Letters to the editor, May 4, 2012

Voters must demand better Clean Election system

Thank you for the editorial explaining the toll that the Maine Legislature has taken on our Clean Election program (April 25).

The drop-off in participation, while disappointing, is entirely understandable. Rather than strengthening the program after a court decision took away the matching funds that allowed candidates to run on a level playing field -- one of the best parts of the program -- a majority in Augusta took the path of least resistance and did nothing.

Naturally, the diminished system is less attractive to candidates, especially those who face very tough races against high-spending opponents. In this era of colossal super PAC spending, we can expect another onslaught of so-called "independent" spending, and if history is any guide, much of it will sling mud and level spurious attacks at targeted candidates.

The Legislature could have equipped Clean Election candidates with the means to respond to these sorts of attacks by passing a "requalifying" amendment to the law. This would have kept the program strong and viable for most candidates, and it would have done so within existing resources.

This system, which was used by candidates in both parties, encouraged independent decision making by elected officials and an open stream of communication between the officials and the constituents who supported them. This decision opens the door to outside influence of large spending in Maine politics and causes our leadership to become less accountable to the people they represent.

By doing nothing, our Legislature's majority has amplified the voices of the best-funded special interests at the expense of candidates, voters and democracy itself. Now it is up to voters to cut through the noise and find out exactly what candidates stand for. Put them on the spot and ask them if they support a strong Clean Election system for all candidates.

Isabelle V. Weyl
Portland