



Mainers Stand Strong for Clean Elections

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Augusta – Dozens of Maine people turned out to defend Maine’s first-in-the-nation Clean Elections law at legislative hearings on Wednesday.

The Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs conducted hearings on three bills that eliminate parts of the popular citizen-initiated law. LD 120, which would eliminate the opportunity for gubernatorial candidates to use the Clean Election system, drew the most opposition from the overflow crowd.

One after another, people from across the state reminded the committee that voters passed Clean Elections by a wide margin in 1996 and continue to support it.

Jane Edwards, a retired librarian from East Vassalboro said, “Passing the Clean Elections Law is one of the best things we have done, and we should not repeal it, we should keep it and expand it and improve it.”

Many speakers mentioned the value of the Clean Election system, especially for gubernatorial candidates. Ralph Johnson, a 90 year-old WWII veteran from Windham, said, “Severing the connection between private money and public office is important for all offices, but most important for Governor.”

Maine’s role as a national leader was also highlighted. “Maine has led the way in campaign finance reform efforts and is a sterling example to the Nation of government “of, by and for the people,” remarked Deborrah Jabar of South Portland. She also said that thousands of Maine people check yes for Clean Elections on their income tax forms each year.

Ben Chin of Lewiston, speaking on behalf of the 32,000 member Maine People’s Alliance, spoke of the importance of having qualified candidates from diverse backgrounds run for office. “We believe clean election, especially for gubernatorial candidates, is one of the most important ways that we can guarantee we have the best people to solve our toughest problems...”

The League of Women Voters of Maine was represented by Ann Luther of Trenton who pointed out that the cost to Maine taxpayers for funding Clean Election candidates in the race for governor amounts to just 67 cents a year.

"Some things are worth owning, and democracy is one of them," said Eric McCabe Johnson of Portland. "Citizens have the opportunity to own democracy in this state. Don't give it away."

Alison Smith, Co-president of Maine Citizens for Clean Elections, said that other damaging bills, including a full repeal of Clean Elections would be introduced later in the legislative session. She asked the Committee to respect the will of Maine voters by keeping the Clean Election program intact.

A work session will be held on the Clean Election bills on February 25th.

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