



**For Immediate Release**

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**Contact:**

Andrew Bossie  
MCCE Executive Director  
207-831-6223

**Clean Elections on Track to be Weakened By Legislature**

Deep cuts to funding eliminate Clean Elections in 2014 gubernatorial race

AUGUSTA, ME - The budget compromise awaiting action by the legislature and Governor LePage contains deep cuts to the Maine Clean Election program, including suspending all funding for gubernatorial candidates in the 2014 election. The legislature did restore \$2.8 million to the program over the next two years; in his original budget proposal, the governor eliminated all funding for the program put in place by Maine voters in 1996.

“For the first time since Clean Elections went into effect, candidates for our state’s highest office will not have a Clean Election option,” said Andrew Bossie, Executive Director of Maine Citizens for Clean Elections (MCCE). “But candidates for our state’s highest office should have the ability to use Clean Elections and rely on Maine voters for small donations, rather than using Washington-style fundraising tactics to raise big money from out of state interests.”

MCCE recently released polling that shows that 84% of Maine people think it’s important to continue to have Clean Elections, and a combined 83% believe that candidates for governor should either use, or have an option to use, Clean Elections.

Under the citizen-initiated Maine Clean Election Act, an allotment of \$2 million is to be transferred from the General Fund to the Maine Clean Election Fund, which is designed as a separate, dedicated, nonlapsing, interest-bearing fund, each January. The appropriation in the budget shortchanges Clean Elections by \$1.2 million over two years. Also contributing to the underfunding of Clean Elections is the \$5.1 million that was taken from the Fund and used for unrelated state programs over the years and never returned. Earlier in the legislative session, the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee recommended appropriating \$9 million for Clean Elections in the budget in order to fulfill the statutory requirements and restore most of the borrowed funds.

“This budget drastically underfunds Clean Elections, just when concern about the influence of special interest money in elections and government is at an all-time high,” said Bossie.

Still awaiting legislative votes is LD 1309, An Act to Strengthen the Maine Clean Election Act, a bill sponsored by Senator Ed Youngblood (R-Penobscot) and strongly supported by MCCE. The bill replaces the matching funds provisions of Clean Elections, which were eliminated after a court decision, with an optional system of supplemental funding. That bill came out of committee with a majority “Ought to Pass” vote and has bipartisan support in the legislature.

The bill aims to allow Clean Elections candidates in high-spending races to access adequate resources to remain competitive in their bids for state office. Under the measure, legislative and gubernatorial candidates could qualify for limited supplemental campaign funding if they gather additional Qualifying Contributions of \$5 from voters in their district during the course of their campaign.

“Senator Youngblood’s bill would restore laws enacted by Maine people to fight the influence of special interest money in our government,” said Bossie. “It would give candidates a fighting chance against the onslaught of outside money that has come to dominate many Maine races, and it would keep Maine voters where they belong – right at the center of our elections.”

In order to implement LD 1309, full restoration of funding as recommended by the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee is necessary. If it passes in the House and Senate, its fate will be determined on the Appropriations table.

The one element of Clean Elections that did get a boost in the budget is the distributions to legislative candidates. The Appropriations Committee specified that the amount for candidates for House and Senate be raised by 20% over what was available in 2012.

Participation levels in the legislative Clean Election program dropped from a high of 85% to 70% in 2012 after the Supreme Court invalidated triggered matching funds and the 125<sup>th</sup> Legislature failed to enact a replacement. That legislature also decreased the initial distributions received by participating candidates. While some candidates opted to raise private money, some who ran using Clean Elections found themselves being outspent many times over by opponents and outside PACs. For the first time in Maine elections, outside PACs spent more money in legislative races than candidates themselves.

“Higher distributions will help in many legislative races, but without the supplemental funding program it will not make much difference in races with targeted outside spending. Clearly, there will be a big role for political action committees and parties to play as they fill in with mailings and advertising to benefit the underfunded candidates they support. And many candidates may opt out of Clean Elections, as they did in 2012,” continued Bossie. “Maine people lose when our campaign finance rules encourage more outside money and pushes candidates back into the private funding realm.”

Several other campaign finance bills await action by Governor LePage after passing in the House and Senate. LD 1023 brings transparency to the fundraising done by governors-elect after the election to pay for transition and inaugural expenses. Currently this fundraising activity is completely unregulated. LD 1271 increases penalties for campaign finance reporting violations. MCCE supports both bills.

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