



Testimony before the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

LD 175, An Act To Limit Maine Clean Election Act Funding to First-time Candidates

Monday, February 23, 2015

Senator Cyrway, Representative Luchini and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs:

My name is Ed Youngblood, and I am here to testify on behalf of Maine Citizens for Clean Elections. Maine Citizens for Clean Elections (MCCE) is a nonpartisan organization that works in the public interest to educate the public and to defend and improve the Maine Clean Election Act and related campaign finance law.

As many of you know, I represented the people of Brewer in the Senate during the 120th and 121st Legislatures, and after an eight year break I was re-elected to serve in the 126th Legislature.

In each of my campaigns for the Senate, I used the Maine Clean Election Act system. I always told my constituents that I was a Clean Election Act candidate, and I believe they supported that decision. Clean Elections has allowed people to run for office – women and blue collar folks – who might not have had a chance otherwise. It is a very valuable program.

As a banking executive, I easily could have raised the money to fund my campaigns, but I chose not to. I believe it is important for a legislator to represent the people, and that obligation should not be clouded by the interests of lobbyists who are making sizable campaign contributions.

LD 175 would dramatically change the Clean Election system. First time candidates could use the program, but Clean Elections would no longer be available for the second, third or fourth campaign.

I think the idea behind this is that once a candidate has been elected, he or she has access to a new group of contributors that were not available in the first campaign. That is exactly what troubles me with this bill. It would be so easy for an incumbent to raise money from lobbyists, but the need for Clean Elections is just as strong for candidates who are incumbents as it is for new candidates.

Many lobbyists are very helpful, but legislators are here to represent the public, not the lobbyists or their clients. Lobbyists and maybe others would open their wallets for the second, third or fourth campaign, but is that really the direction we want? I think that just invites criticism.

It is easy to say a person can't be bought for \$375, but once a person accepts a large contribution from someone with business before that legislator, it has to be in the back of their mind.

I know from firsthand experience that lobbyists are ready to give that contribution. When I announced that I was running for re-election the last time around, I started receiving checks from lobbyists. I had not solicited contributions, but they just sent the checks to me. That's how it works.

I don't think it is a good idea to limit Clean Elections to new candidates simply because incumbents have access to contributions from folks around Augusta. The impact of that change on our democracy would worry me, and that is why I have to oppose this bill.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify on LD 175. I would be happy to address any questions you may have.