



TO: The Honorable Senator Nichi Farnham, Senate Chair
The Honorable Representative Michael Beaulieu, House Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

DATE: February 16, 2011

RE: LD 80, An Act Regarding Maine Clean Election Act Funds for a Candidate without a Primary Opponent *Sponsored by Representative L. Knight*

Maine Citizens for Clean Elections OPPOSES LD 80.

VIABILITY. Over ten years and six cycles of Clean Elections, the system has demonstrated its viability. One of the reasons is that it puts adequate resources in the hands of qualified candidates at each stage of the campaign.

Eliminating primary funding in uncontested races would create a “blackout” period from the Qualifying Deadline in April until after the June primary. This would dramatically lessen the viability and appeal of the system. While the future general election opponent is in the news every day, the uncontested candidate would disappear from view. This could be a significant disadvantage, especially in the gubernatorial race.

VOTERS. Voters need to know who will represent them, and they need to know whose name they will see on the ballot when they vote. Cutting the primary distribution to zero would not help voters. Our Clean Election law originally had no distribution in uncontested general election races. This was roundly criticized, and survey research confirmed a strong sense that there ought to be a modest distribution, just enough to do a mailing or create some signs – something to let voters know that you are running and will represent them in the next legislature. The same sentiment should apply to uncontested primary elections.

SAVINGS v INTEGRITY OF THE CLEAN ELECTION SYSTEM. Currently, distributions are small, so the savings from cutting them would also be small. The bill has a fiscal note showing a savings of \$230,720 based on certain assumptions for the 2012-13 fiscal year. In a

Member Organizations

AARP Maine, Common Cause Maine, EqualityMaine, League of Women Voters of Maine, League of Young Voters, Maine AFL-CIO, Maine Council of Churches, Maine People's Alliance/Maine People's Resource Center, Maine State Employees Association/SEIU Local 1989, Maine Women's Lobby, NAACP-Portland, Sierra Club Maine Chapter

future gubernatorial race, the savings would be \$200,000 for each uncontested candidate, and of course no savings would be realized if all primaries are contested as they often are in the gubernatorial race.

Maine people rely on this oversight committee to honor the integrity of this citizen-initiated law. The only changes that should be made are those that improve the law. Sometimes problems need to be fixed. Sometimes measures need strengthening. Lessening the viability of the system and denying voters the ability to hear from certain candidates during the campaign would not be consistent with this approach. Voters are counting on you to respect their law.

ALTERNATIVE DISTRIBUTION DETERMINATION. The 124th Legislature amended the statute to give the Ethics Commission more leeway in coming up with distribution levels. Rather than sticking strictly to the average of what was spend in races over several cycles, the Commission may take many factors into account. No doubt the Commission will revisit the uncontested primary amount as part of this work. Rather than recommending the elimination of uncontested primary funding, this committee can simply provide relevant information to the Ethics Commission that they can take into account as they consider new distribution levels for future elections.

Please vote Ought NOT to pass on LD 80.