



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 120, An Act to End Taxpayer-funded Campaigns for Gubernatorial Candidates"

Sponsored by Representative Tyler Clark

Maine Citizens for Clean Elections OPPOSES LD 120.

MCCE believes that it is vital to have the option for Clean Election funding in the governor's race. After all, the gubernatorial Clean Election program is just as much a part of the citizen-initiated Maine Clean Election Act as the legislative system. When voters passed Clean Elections, they created a full public funding system for qualified candidates in all state races – House, Senate and the Blaine House – so that candidates would not have to rely on private money to run a campaign.

There is no reason to switch back to a private funding system for all gubernatorial candidates when the Clean Election system remains so popular and viable, and the threat of undue influence from special interests is so real. This is the highest office we have, and it is the place where the outsized influence of special interests could have the most devastating results.

The State House is full of well-paid lobbyists representing every possible industry that might have a vested interest in the outcome of legislation. While every one of you has a little bit of power in the process of a bill becoming a law, the governor has the most. It is the single most powerful office in the state. Maine people have a continuing interest in keeping the public interest at the forefront of lawmaking, and severing the connection between private special interests and public office is especially important in the gubernatorial race.

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

Few laws boast such bipartisan support as does this one. We don't have a Clean Election governor yet, but we know that our first one could come from any part of the political spectrum. Republicans and Greens were the first to try Clean Elections in the race for governor, and Democrats and one independent candidate qualified in later years.

Earlier legislatures rejected the idea of eliminating funding in the gubernatorial race and chose to strengthen the system instead. Today we have a viable system that works for strong candidates and has a high degree of built-in accountability. This system has value for Maine people. Freed from the demands of fundraising, qualified candidates are able to focus on the voters and the issues. And since they may not raise additional monies, they must stick to a disciplined budget. That's good preparation for spending and managing public dollars once elected.

Much has been made about the fact that Clean Elections relies on taxpayer funding. Public funding is what the voters voted for, and the program does depend on a \$2 million allotment from the General Fund each year. That comes to less than \$2 each, and almost every bit of it is spent right here in Maine. But there is more to the funding story. Voluntary contributions are also an important feature of the Clean Election system, and the 40,000 Qualifying Contributions that were made last year is pretty good evidence of that. Many of these were made in support of gubernatorial candidates. If people did not want candidates to use Clean Elections, they would not have willingly contributed thousands of dollars so that they could. And thousands of Maine people are getting ready to check Yes on their tax forms once again, earmarking \$3 for Clean Elections with each check mark.

In future weeks you will hear other bills that lop off parts of Clean Elections, and you will hear a full repeal bill, too. None of these bills respect the will of Maine voters. We hope you will reject these damaging bills and focus instead on a handful of improvements that would strengthen the system.

Please keep the Clean Election Act intact, and vote Ought NOT to Pass on LD 120.