

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

DATE: March 28, 2011

**RE: LD 814 An Act Relating To Political Action Committees
Sponsored by *Representative Michael Carey***

Statement in Support of LD 814

My name is Ann Luther. I'm a resident of Trenton. My work as a volunteer for some "good government" organizations brings me frequently before this Committee on election-related issues, but I'm here today – on this issue – merely as an interested citizen, bringing only my own point of view.

I consider myself a patriot and a capitalist. I believe that the founding of the American republic is one of the shining moments in human history, and that the American experiment in self-governance has been a beacon of hope to the rest of the world for over two centuries.

I believe that economic enterprise, trade, and commerce are as essential to a functioning democracy as the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

However, I also believe that there is nothing more antithetical to the rights of citizens in a democratic republic than too much concentrated wealth and power. I quote Robert La Follette when I say: "The supreme issue, involving all the others, is the encroachment of the powerful few upon the rights of the many."

Today in our country, we have more concentrated wealth than at any time in the last century. And when big-moneyed interests spend in political campaigns, they create a feedback loop in public policy that further advantages their own interests, deepening the chasm between themselves and ordinary people.

While the First Amendment protects our right to spend money on political speech from the encroachment of government, the courts have never considered or ruled on the possibility of wealthy special interests overwhelming campaigns, clogging the channels of political discourse, monopolizing media outlets, and denying equal access to ordinary citizens with ordinary financial means. But this is precisely the situation that we are beginning to face today.

For the sake of our democracy, we must continue to push back on big money in politics. This may be a never-ending endeavor, but we can't afford to give up.

Here in Maine, we've made a great start with the Maine Clean Election Act, and we're very lucky to have it. We must fight to keep it, but we can't rest there. We must also push forward with the next round of reforms, and that leads us to candidate PACs. We are one of the few states in the nation, and the only one in New England, that has NO LIMITS on what anyone can contribute to a candidate PAC.

PACs aren't bad in and of themselves. They allow people of like mind to pool their resources to further their cause, and there's nothing wrong with that. But today big money floods into PACs – huge donations from vested interests that find their way into Maine races. And because we have no limits, Maine is becoming a dumping ground for out-of-state money that can't be used to finance electioneering at home. Because our media markets are inexpensive, we're an attractive target. Why should Maine be for sale to these out-of-state interests that can't buy influence with voters at home?

I'm convinced that contribution limits to candidate PACs are the next most essential reform. You will hear other bills today and other proposals in the weeks to come. Some of these ideas have merit, some of them not so much. But none of these other measures will have much effect without this one.

In 1787, at the close of the Constitutional Convention, as he left the Independence Hall on the last day, Dr. Benjamin Franklin was approached by a man on the street, who asked, "Well, Doctor, what have we got?" Franklin famously answered, "A Republic, if you can keep it." Whether we can keep it or not is a question that must be revisited by each succeeding generation.

It's our turn now. LD 814 is a very modest next step for reform, but it could make an important contribution to our democratic future.

Ann Luther
14 Loon Cove Lane
Trenton, ME 04605
ann.m.luther@gmail.com
207.460.9587