



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MAINE

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TO: The Honorable Senator Richard Rosen, Senate Chair
The Honorable Representative Patrick Flood, House Chair
The Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs

DATE: March 21, 2012

RE: Maine Clean Election Act

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I am Ann Luther, Advocacy Chair for the League of Women Voters of Maine.

The League of Women Voters has been working on campaign finance reform nationally since 1974. We are proud to be a founding member of the MCCE coalition. Our members were among the many volunteers who gathered signatures to pass the Maine Clean Election Act.

This is not the first administration to propose cutting Clean Election funding in tough budget times. In fact, if you didn't propose such cuts, you would be the first administration that failed to do so. But this is the first legislature and the first governor to preside over such a significant diminution of the Clean Election program that the money might not be needed. It gives us no pleasure to say so.

The money might not be needed because of the unfortunate policy choices already made by this legislature that

- Failed to enact a viable replacement for the matching funds system that was struck down by an unfriendly Supreme Court; and
- Destroyed the balance between the public and private funding systems in gubernatorial races.

Will there be big savings ahead because our weakened system will not enjoy 80% participation in future election cycles?

Will there be further savings as candidate campaigns are starved while PACs, parties, and corporations increase their so-called "independent" spending?

Will there be still more savings because no gubernatorial candidate will opt into a woefully underfunded Clean Elections campaign in the race for Governor in 2014?

Maybe so. So given the damaging changes that have already been made to the Clean Elections program in this biennium, we can see why you're tempted to make these budget cuts, too; and it's hard to argue against the proposition that the system as it now stands might not need this money.

So why shouldn't you take the money?

Here's why: because when the public money goes out of Clean Elections, the private money floods in. We can expect more influence from wealthy self-serving, private interests; and more candidate reliance on and fidelity to their corporate-funded PACs.

This is not what Maine people want.

You have a chance to do what no previous administration has done in the Clean Elections era: make an investment in a stronger system for the future. Leave the money alone. The public is not going to give up on campaign finance reform, and publicly funded elections will be part of the solution. Whether they look the same tomorrow as they do today, who can say? Maybe not. But we will need this money.

More than a decade after its passage, the Clean Elections system is still strongly supported by Maine people. Especially now, maybe more than ever, we need to address head-on the outsized influence of special interest money in our elections. Especially after Citizens United opened up the floodgates of corporate money in our elections, people are rightly concerned about the health of their democracy. I urge you to take the lead, respond to that concern, preserve the funding for Clean Elections.