



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MAINE

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TO: The Honorable Senator John L. Tuttle, Jr.
The Honorable Representative Louis J. Luchini, Co-chairs
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

DATE: March 27, 2013

RE: LD 924 An Act To Prevent a Conflict of Interest of the Secretary of State

My name is Ann Luther. I'm a resident of Trenton. I work as a volunteer for the League of Women Voters of Maine and chair its Advocacy Committee.

The League of Women Voters believes that responsible government should be responsive to the will of the people and that it should be free from undue influence, corruption, and the appearance of corruption. We support measures that encourage governmental ethics and that give citizens confidence that public affairs are being conducted in the public's best interests. The League supports LD 924 and urges that you vote Ought to Pass.

The Maine Secretary of State is our highest election official, responsible for the conduct of state and federal elections. The office of the Secretary of State shapes policy regarding elections in countless ways, large and small, from the introduction of agency legislation, through rulemaking, enforcement, setting of procedures, and deployment of state resources.

Leagues in other states around the country have been and are advocating for election administration to be handled by a nonpartisan office. In Wisconsin, for example, the election function of the Secretary of State has been replaced by an appointed nonpartisan Government Accountability Board.

It must be seen as a conflict of interest for the State's highest election official to have a vested interest in the outcome of the election. This would be true if the Secretary runs for office, but it is also true if the Secretary leads a political party or heads the campaign committee of another candidate. We urge you to consider whether the prohibition in LD 924 goes far enough in preventing the office holder from having a significant stake in the outcome of an election.

It is also important that those prohibitions be formal and visible to the public. It is insufficient for the Secretary of State to offer verbal assurances that he or she will keep the election at arm's length, turning over all day-to-day functions to their Deputy.

We urge you to vote LD 924 Ought to Pass and ask you to consider expanding the ban to cover the Secretary of State's high-level involvement in political parties or campaign committees, as well as instances where they run for office themselves.