



Testimony before the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

LD 334, An Act To Improve the Maine Clean Election Act

Monday, March 2, 2015

Senator Cyrway, Representative Luchini and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on LD 334, An Act To Improve the Maine Clean Election Act. My name is John Brautigam, and I am testifying on behalf of Maine Citizens for Clean Elections.

Maine Citizens for Clean Elections (MCCE) is a nonpartisan organization that works in the public interest to advocate for, defend and improve the Maine Clean Election Act and related campaign finance law. We have been at this work since the 1990's. Whenever there is legislation relating to our campaign finance and reporting system, MCCE works to bring the point of view of Maine citizens to the decision-making table.

We appreciate the spirit in which Representative Devin has brought forward this bill, as he is motivated by integrity in our election financing system.

MCCE has been working to protect and advance the integrity of our election system for 20 years. We strongly support reforming the system of leadership PACs. The public is demanding reform.

No one should be allowed to evade contribution limits.

No one should use a PAC to circumvent the rules.

No one should break the public trust.

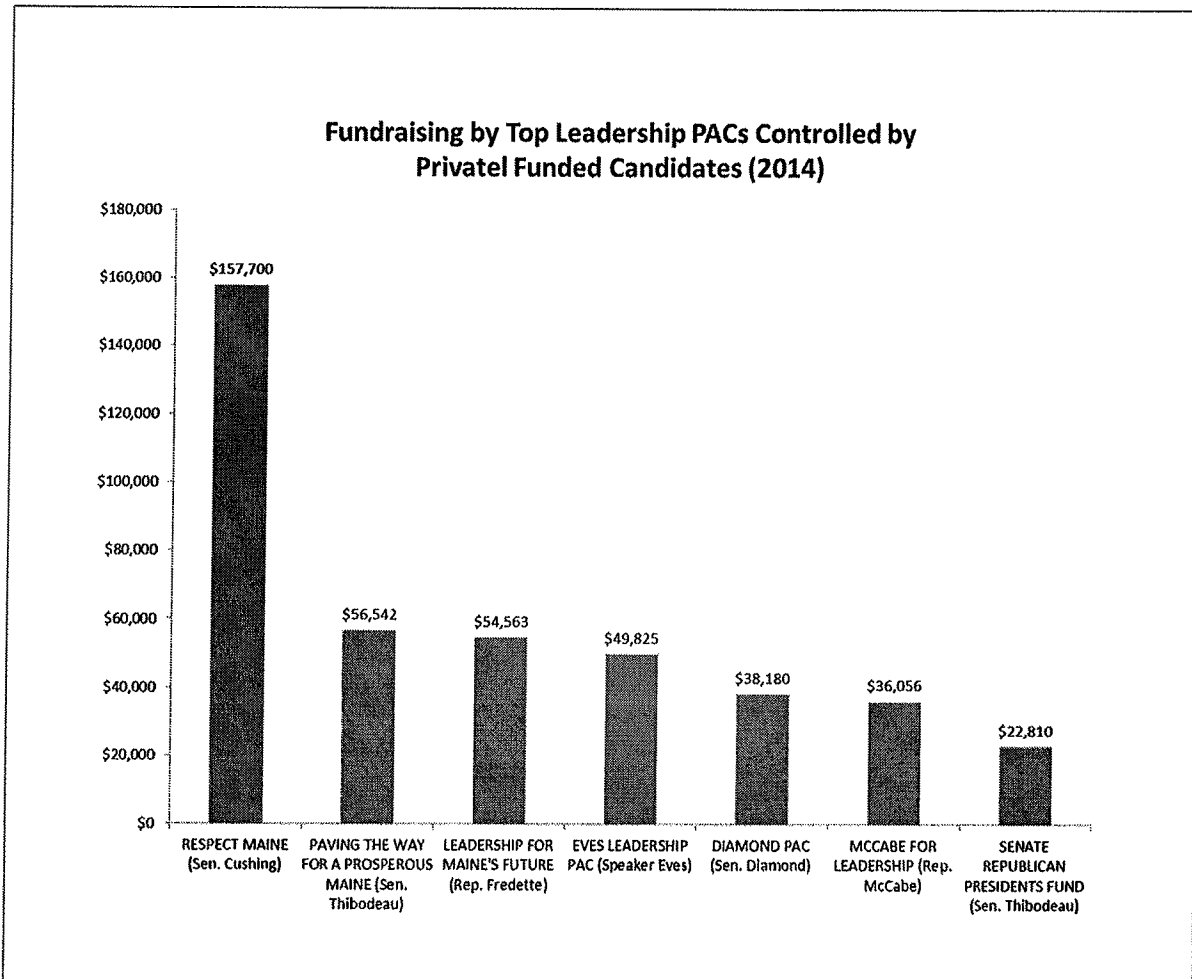
Large contributions solicited by and made to candidates and legislators from wealthy, special interest contributors remain a big problem in Maine. Representative Chenette called it "legal bribery." Rep. Mastraccio said, "Money buys influence."

During the last election cycle leadership PACs raised over a million dollars. They received tens of thousands of dollars from cigarette makers, big drug companies, the chemical industry, tobacco interests, big insurance companies, lobbyists, and law firms. The list goes on and on. Very little of that money was from Maine families or small, individual contributors.

LD 334 would put strict limits on only some leadership PACs – those operated by Clean Election candidates. Let’s be clear about one thing: Many of the people operating leadership PACs, and lots of the money raised by them, are not Clean Elections candidates.

You can’t address the “legalized bribery” of leadership PAC money, the “dirty politicians,” or the “cancer” on our democracy if you are going to look the other way and ignore all that special interest money.

The public wants a bill that will close all the loopholes. The public does not want a half-way bill that leaves a huge problem. The public wants a solution. We want a solution.



It is possible to solve this problem. Let’s solve the fundamental issue here. Let’s not see a fig leaf bill that skirts over the real problem.

MCCE proposes a solution based on the following three points:

1. Real reform requires addressing the huge contributions raised by leadership PACs operated by privately funded candidates, as well as those operated by Clean Elections candidates. You can’t solve the problem by eliminating half of

the leadership PACs any more than you can fix a sinking boat by patching up half of the holes.

2. There is a legitimate, acceptable role for fundraising by the House and Senate party caucuses. We support allowing each caucus to operate a PAC that is controlled by the caucus. These caucus PACs should be transparent; they should be allowed to accept contributions up to \$10,000; and all candidates and legislators should be able to participate as long as they are not themselves the beneficiary of caucus PAC expenditures.

3. We need to close the loophole that lets any candidate – Clean Elections or private – raise money beyond the contribution limits that Maine people support. No candidate should have their own personal PAC in addition to their campaign committee. Period. This is simply wrong and needs to end.

We are ready to sit down with any or all of the committee and bill sponsors, and with Jonathan Wayne, to work out a bill that is more than a “feel good” bill, but really addresses the issue.

Some of the testimony we have heard implies that nobody really cares when privately funded candidates exploit the leadership PAC loophole because they are already bought and paid for. Please don't enact that point of view into Maine law. Those candidates are bound by low contribution limits in their candidate campaign. Those contribution limits, along with the Maine Clean Election Act, work together to give us a government of, by and for the people. Let's protect that ideal.

This is not really a complicated problem. No more leadership PACs. Period. Let's get this done.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.