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Story: Clean elections only fair

Forum discusses
campaign dollars

By MATT ELDER
COLLEGIAN STAFF

Three speakers at the University of Massachusetts addressed a group of students, professors and community members yesterday as part of a forum on the discussion of clean elections.

State Representative Ellen Story (D-3rd Hampshire), Tim Carpenter, the western Massachusetts organizer for Mass Voters for Clean Elections, and graduate student Lauren Mattison spoke to the group about the campaign to help candidates who do not have a lot of money run for a political office.

Clean Elections provides public funding and financing for qualified candidates. To qualify, candidates would have very strict spending and contribution limits.

"People are afraid of Clean Elections," Story said.

Mattison said that in Massachusetts, people who win a seat in the house spend roughly four times more than the opposition, and that people who win a seat in the Senate spend roughly six times as much. She also noted how hard it is for people to beat the incumbent.

Mattison said that candidates spend roughly half their time fundraising.

Story said that she thought some candidates are afraid to challenge incumbents, and that Clean Elections would level the playing field.

"[Clean Elections] is common sense idea for me," Story said. "It's just basic fairness."

Mattison said that in 1998, a 67 percent majority passed a Clean Elections law. It passed in every city and town in the state.

"This was a hard-fought victory for us," said Story.

In 2002 the State Legislature refused to allocate the funds to Clean Election candidates, Mattison said. Despite the opposition, eleven people ran as Clean Elections candidates.

"We did elect one Clean Election representative," Mattison said. However, shortly after that, the law was repealed in June 2003.



GERALD H. LING/COLLEGIAN

Ellen Story speaks at the Clean Elections forum in the Campus Center yesterday. Story, who has been a state representative for 12 years, gave herself a \$30,000 budget for her first campaign.

"It's sad because it was never really implemented," Mattison said about the loss.

"Everything was going just right. Then the Legislature came in and ruined it," Story said.

Mattison said that Clean Elections would've cost the taxpayers \$4 a year.

"We were sort of a national embarrassment," Mattison said.

"Clean Elections was stolen from us," Carpenter said.

According to Mattison, the law got a lot of public support from such newspapers like The Boston Globe, New York Times and Cape Cod Times.

Mattison also said that opposition came from candidates who receive a lot of public backing. She said that on a national level, tax breaks are given to politically connected companies.

Concerning the public opposition, Story noted that "people didn't want their tax dollars going for things like bumper stickers and lawn signs for people that they didn't agree with."

"When I ran (for State Representative), the salary was \$30,000," Story said. The "ironic part" was that she gave herself a \$30,000 budget for her campaign. The average spending that year was about \$28,000.

Story has been a state representative for 12 years. Originally, she won her seat due to a death in the Congressional Office. Since then she's won about three of her campaigns uncontested.

Mattison said that Maine and Arizona have Clean Elections law, but Arizona is now facing opposition to

get it repealed. Story said that both parties, and not just Republicans, could benefit from these laws.

"Money is still the name of the game and has crippled Democrats," Carpenter said.

"It's a bi-partisan issue," Carpenter said. Arizona has elected candidates from both parties as Clean Election candidates.

Mattison said that the next step includes meetings across the state to spread awareness on the issue. "We're going to start over, and we're going to start from scratch," Story said.

The University Democrats and Mass Voters for Clean Elections co-sponsored the event.

On the Net: Mass Voters for Clean Elections website at www.massvoters.org.

full text on following page

Story: Clean Elections only fair

By Matt Elder, Collegian Staff
December 05, 2003

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