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Testimony of Representative Nicole Grohoski
In Support of LD 194, *An Act To Prohibit Contributions, Expenditures and Participation*
by Foreign Government-owned Entities To Influence Referenda

Before the Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs
15 March 2021

Good morning Senator Luchini, Representative Caiazzo and members of the Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs. I am Nicole Grohoski, and I represent the communities of Ellsworth and Trenton in the Maine House. I appreciate the opportunity to speak in support of LD 194, *An Act To Prohibit Contributions, Expenditures and Participation by Foreign Government-owned Entities To Influence Referenda*, which was presented by Senator Bennett. I urge your support for this timely bill as emergency legislation.

Maine law contains a shocking loophole that allows foreign governments to directly influence Maine policy via expenditures on referendum questions. Our laws do not allow these governments to contribute money to the elections of lawmakers, so it is astounding that we allow them to contribute to directly influence the making of laws. LD 194 proposes to close this loophole in order to prevent foreign government interference in our democracy.

The inconsistency in our laws on foreign government expenditures was brought to light when Hydro-Quebec, a crown corporation fully owned by the Province of Quebec, started spending significant funds to influence a citizen's initiative long before it was certain to go to ballot. Interestingly, such spending is prohibited in Quebec under its laws. Hydro-Quebec is exploiting our loophole in order to profit and return that benefit to the taxpayers of Quebec. They have good reason to spend some money here to make more money there. Why should the citizens and taxpayers of Maine tolerate this?

Regardless of your position on the New England Clean Energy Connect (commonly referred to as the CMP Corridor), I hope you will agree that a foreign government should not be allowed to spend \$10 million over 15 months to influence the outcome of a Maine referendum question. That is over \$21,900 per day!

Constituents in my district regularly contact me to ask when the Legislature will put a stop to this. They are tired of seeing ads that use unrelated images of beloved Maine sites like Katahdin and Jordan Pond and the Bubbles in Acadia National Park to persuade them that this project is

for and about Maine. They are tired of their airwaves continually being clogged by the message that the CMP Corridor is necessary to save our lobsters, blueberries, and children's future.

I hope that later this week in your work session, your esteemed committee will start to answer the question of my constituents and all Maine people who share their concerns -- now is the time to eliminate foreign government interference in our ballot questions. I especially encourage you to proceed with the emergency status of this bill, since we have a long spring, summer, and fall ahead of us before November. I want to thank you all for listening attentively to my testimony in support of LD 194 and I would be happy to answer any questions.