



March 12, 2021

Dear Honorable Members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee,

I am writing on behalf of Say NO to NECEC, a grassroots 501c3 non-profit organization, which is an environmental, education and advocacy group opposed to large-scale industrial development in western Maine. Say NO to NECEC was founded in 2018 and comprises nearly 10,000 members.

We are a non-partisan and member-funded organization opposed to Central Maine Power's (CMP's) New England Clean Energy Connect (NECEC) project to build a 145-mile transmission line from the Québec-Maine border to Lewiston. Some of our members have been engaged as citizen intervenors at the Maine DEP and LUPC and are participants in the DEP permit appeal. Additionally, our members have been involved in submitting testimony to the Legislature and have volunteered to collect signatures to leverage a referendum vote in November 2021.

I am writing to urge the VLA Committee to support LD194 and LD479.

According to the Maine Ethics Commission, Hydro-Quebec, a corporation owned by the Canadian government, funneled an unprecedented \$9.2 million into their PAC in 2020. Each year, they share billions in dividends with the government as their sole shareholder. After facing scrutiny, HQ changed their PAC address from Montreal to Hartford, CT in an attempt to seem less foreign although the PAC treasurer and Principal Officer still remain in Montreal.

While Federal law prohibits this sort of foreign interference in elections, HQ discovered a loophole in Maine, and have exploited it to tell Mainers how to vote on Central Maine Power's unpopular NECEC project. We know that this sort of foreign interference is illegal in Canada.

HQ is a Crown Corporation that is solely owned by the Province of Quebec. Last year, HQ was assessed a \$35,000 fine last year by the Maine Ethics Commission after pleading guilty to spending \$100,000 to influence Maine voters before registering as a PAC, which a clear violation of Maine's campaign finance law. This fine is the second-largest campaign violation fine in our state's history.

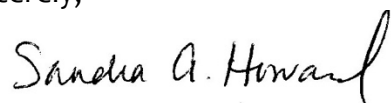
In 2020, HQ misused images of Baxter State Park, a Maine treasure, in an ad that was strongly rebuked by Friends of Baxter State Park. While spending tens of millions of dollars to influence Maine voters and lawmakers, HQ has never provided verifiable evidence about their environmental claims regarding NECEC nor did their representatives submit sworn testimony at state and Federal approval agencies.

Over 80,000 Mainers signed the most recent anti-corridor referendum. Despite the millions of dollars Hydro-Quebec spent in collaboration with Central Maine Power/Avangrid/Iberdrola, another foreign-owned corporation, recent polling shows that those efforts were ineffective and that a majority of Mainers continue to oppose the for-profit project. But the larger issue is that a foreign-owned corporation and its government owner should not be able to influence a vote in Maine. As you know by their aggressive lobbying efforts and statewide media campaign, Hydro-Quebec has exposed a weakness in Maine's election law that needs to be fixed.

Mainers know best on how to make decisions that impact Maine.

We ask the VLA Committee members to support LD194: An Act To Prohibit Contributions, Expenditures and Participation by Foreign Government-owned Entities To Influence Referenda and LD 479: An Act To Ban Foreign Campaign Contributions and Expenditures in Maine Elections to help close the loophole that exists to protect Maine in the future from a dangerous precedent for referendums to come.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sandra A. Howard". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, flowing "S" at the beginning.

Sandra Howard, Ph.D.
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