

Good morning Senator Luchini, Representative Caiazzo, and Members of the Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs. My name is Kate Weatherby, I live in New Sharon, and I represent myself. Thank you for providing this opportunity to speak to you about LDs 194, 479, and 641.

Just a little over a year ago, I testified before this committee on LD 2136. I am so heartened to see that not only has the language of LD 2136 been brought back to life with LD 641, but that LDs 194 and 479 seek to extend the proposed protections against foreign interference in Maine's electoral process by excluding interference by foreign government-owned entities in Maine's referendum process and regulating interference by foreign nationals in Maine's campaigns and communications tied to our electoral process. While re-reading last year's testimony, I was struck by how relevant it still is, so I have included a copy of it below, but I also realized how much more I have to say about the matter.

One change I noticed this year was that, as I was driving to the polling station on November 3, 2020 to collect signatures opposing Central Maine Power's NECEC project, I was not subjected to another PR stunt by HydroQuebec, trying to sway voters into supporting CMP's corridor. It's possible they chose to act with more caution this year after the Maine Ethics Commission fined them \$35,000 for campaign finance violations. It's also possible they didn't feel that effort was necessary after they had already spent more than \$5.5M (even after you take into account their subcontractor in charge of advertising returned almost \$3M the day before our General Elections) in their attempt to garner support for CMP's project.

The average per capita income in Maine is a little over \$25K. In Franklin and Somerset Counties, where much of the NECEC corridor is proposed to be built, that average drops to under \$21K. I'll be generous and round up, but between monies spent and fines paid, HydroQuebec has spent more than 320 Mainers along the NECEC Corridor would make in a year.

Last year as part of my testimony, I stated that I felt as a direct party of the referendum question, CMP deserved a seat at the table. I stand by that, but I'd like to clarify that by a "seat" I in no way meant to imply that it was okay for CMP to buy the entire table. Not to be outdone by HydroQuebec, CMP has spent an impressive \$13,446,952.40, or enough to employ 640 residents of Franklin or Somerset County. I'm not sure exactly how the bills before us would affect that type of rampant spending, but I do hope they include language that might even the playing field a bit.

Last year there were quite a few parties who testified in opposition to LD 2136, citing concerns about the negative impact the bill might have on businesses owned by foreign nationals or the possibility that the bill would make Maine less attractive to foreign businesses. They seemed to feel that passage of that bill would open the door to rampant referendum questions against any and all foreign-owned businesses.

After I left the hearing, it struck me that they did a disservice to the people of Maine. Maybe I'm naive, but I can't help and think that any frivolous referendum question brought against a foreign-owned business would be unlikely to garner enough support by Mainers to succeed. Likewise, any referendum question with merit brought against a foreign-owned business would indicate that business had done something serious enough that Mainers deserved a chance to vote on it.

Gathering enough signatures to get a referendum question on the ballot is no small feat and even then there's no guarantee the measure will pass. Those who voiced concern last year should trust the system and if they feel there are areas of weakness they should support measures that would address them. Failing to support the bills before us is essentially failing to support the right of Mainers to have free and clear elections. Supporting LDs 194, 479, and 641 would simply give us a voice in how we would like our state to be run without any foreign interference, so I ask you to vote 'Ought to Pass' for LDs 194, 479, and 641. Thank you.

Testimony from March 2020 about LD 2136:

Good morning. My name is Kate Weatherby, I live in New Sharon, and I represent myself. Thank you for providing this opportunity to speak about LD 2136.

One thing that brought me to Maine is its undeveloped wilderness, but something I have come to love about this state is the small town, rural energy. In Maine, it's quite possible to know your legislators and they now know me too. For the first time in my life I feel like my voice actually matters and that it's worth my time and energy to speak up and speak out when I have something to say.

One thing that sets Maine apart from other places I've lived, is the robust use of direct democracy through the form of Citizen's Initiatives and People's Vetoes. One hundred and twelve years ago, Maine politicians saw fit to amend the State Constitution and provide residents with the ability to initiate legislation solely through the will of the voters. While this system may not be perfect, I've participated in multiple efforts to exercise this right.

I was eager to sign up to help with the No CMP Corridor referendum drive and I became involved at a level I had never anticipated. Because the petitioners wanted to give as many people as possible an opportunity to vote on this, they chose to submit the petitions in time to qualify for next November's election. Despite the fact this meant we only had a little over three months to collect the needed signatures, we accomplished that and then some.

In light of that, it is perhaps understandable that Hydro-Quebec feels compelled to convince voters the New England Clean Energy Connect project is in our best interests. What is unacceptable is that they feel entitled to do so, while repeatedly refusing to come and testify under oath **about** said benefits. It caught me off guard to hear Eric Martel, the CEO of Hydro-Quebec, extolling the virtues of this project on Maine Calling **while** I was driving to the polling station last fall to collect signatures. I was appalled that Jennifer Rooks gave him this platform to sway voters to his cause **on polling** day. My impression at the time was that he was finally willing to peer out from behind his curtain because he **knew hundreds** of us were out there in an effort to put a stop to this wildly unpopular transmission line. The one good thing that came of his blatant attempt

to interfere, is that Dylan Voorhees from NRCM solicited a clear refusal from Mr. Martel to testify under oath about the project.

If Hydro-Quebec were truly dealing in good faith, they should **welcome** the opportunity to come and provide verifiable facts that would back up their statements. What we find instead is that they are eager to throw Loonie after Loonie in their attempts to mislead Mainers about NECEC. I must confess that because I don't own a television or subscribe to any newspapers, I have missed most of the advertising efforts by Hydro-Quebec to paint an undeservedly rosy picture of the project. Despite this, those efforts do filter through indirectly and I am nevertheless aware of their campaign. That is how powerful it is!

It was truly incredible to be involved in such a grass-roots effort to collect signatures for the No CMP Corridor petition drive. The number of volunteers who were willing to stand outside day after day and our willingness to show up at the office in Farmington at a moment's notice when help was needed was awe inspiring! It gave me great comfort in this time of political extremes to work on a referendum that crossed all boundaries and to find common cause with such a wide variety of people. But one thing was crystal clear throughout: both Central Maine Power and Hydro-Quebec are willing to spend hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of dollars in their efforts to push this project through. And **we** do not **have** hundreds of thousands, let alone millions, of dollars to stand against this attempt to defeat the will of the people.

As much as I might not agree with them, as the party directly affected by this referendum, and even simply as a tax paying entity in Maine, Central Maine Power deserves a seat at the table. On the other hand, Hydro-Quebec has repeatedly refused to even **come** to the table because they **don't** have a direct stake in pushing the project through Maine's permitting process. Their refusal to do so has enabled them to remain unaccountable, but yet(?) they feel entitled to influence our legislative process?? I don't think so!

We have an opportunity before us to close this loophole that allows a foreign government to interfere with our constitutional rights. I urge you to protect our right to determine our future **without** outside interference and vote in favor of LD 2136. Thank you.