

Hydro-Quebec: Stop meddling in Maine's elections

Maine Lawmakers Call on Hydro-Quebec and the Quebec Government to Immediately Cease Campaign for CMP Corridor

For Immediate Release

Representative Kent Ackley: (207) 512-2524

July 29, 2020 (Augusta, ME) – A bipartisan group of 25 current and former Maine legislators today called on Hydro-Quebec, a foreign government-owned corporation, to immediately cease its multi-million-dollar campaign to influence the November election on Central Maine Power's controversial 145-mile transmission corridor project across Maine.

"We respectfully request that Hydro-Quebec cease all further campaign activities in Maine and let the people of Maine vote without further meddling in our elections by Hydro-Quebec," the lawmakers wrote in a letter addressed to Quebec Premier François Legault and Hydro-Quebec President and CEO Sophie Brochu.

The lawmakers expressed concern that Hydro-Quebec, a Crown Corporation owned solely by the Province of Quebec, is exploiting a loophole in Maine ethics laws that lawmakers were seeking to close when the Maine Legislature abruptly adjourned in March due to the pandemic.

"The residents of Quebec are distant from Maine and unlikely to understand the impacts this project would have on the western Maine forestlands...[and] also are likely unaware of the extent to which Hydro-Quebec is exploiting the loophole in Maine's Ethics Laws to advance this project, and the inaccuracies and deceptions pursued by Hydro-Quebec in its political advertising campaign," states the letter.

[Hydro-Quebec has already spent more than \\$6 million](#) on its campaign to influence how Maine residents will vote on the referendum to terminate the CMP corridor. Hydro-Quebec is on track to spend at least \$10 million by the upcoming November election according to the letter.

For more than six months, Hydro-Quebec's election activities in Maine [have caused significant controversy](#). Hydro-Quebec was [fined \\$35,000](#) by the Maine Ethics Commission for campaign reporting violations, the second-highest ethics violation fine in Maine history. Rep. Ackley (D-Monmouth) and a bipartisan group of lawmakers this year [proposed legislation to terminate Hydro-Quebec's campaign activities](#). The bill, *An Act to Prohibit Contributions, Expenditures and Participation by Foreign Nationals To Influence Referenda* (LD 2136), remains pending before the Maine Legislature.

"If the shoe were on the other foot and Maine voters were directly connected with a campaign to overturn public opinion on a construction project in Quebec, we would hear protests from the people of Quebec. But the shoe is on our foot, and we are not comfortable with it," state the lawmakers.

In 2018, Canada amended its own election laws to prohibit foreign entities from spending money to influence elections. As a result, it is illegal for foreign entities to attempt to influence elections in Quebec even as Quebec is attempting to influence an election in Maine.

The letter concludes: “As current and former representatives of the people of Maine, we feel compelled to request that Hydro-Quebec cease its campaign operations in Maine aimed at trying to manipulate Maine people into accepting a project that all public opinion surveys show they don’t want. We request that you honor the intelligence and rights of Maine voters to decide the fate of the CMP corridor project without foreign government influence from Hydro-Quebec, a Crown Corporation.”

Representative Ackley, who serves on the Veterans & Legal Affairs Committee, said that the escalation of Hydro-Quebec’s campaign activities, including the [hiring of a D.C. based lobbying firm](#), prompted lawmakers to directly contact Hydro-Quebec and the Premier of Quebec. These lawmakers remain interested in passing legislation (LD 2136) to close the loophole in Maine law that is being exploited by Hydro-Quebec.

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July 29, 2020

François Legault
Premier
Édifice Honoré-Mercier, 3e étage
835, boul. René-Lévesque Est
Québec (Québec) G1A 1B4

Sophie Brochu
President and Chief Executive Officer
Hydro-Quebec
75, boulevard René-Lévesque Ouest
Montréal (Québec) H2Z 1A4

Dear Premier Legault and Ms Brochu:

As current and former elected representatives of the Maine State Legislature, we are writing to express our extreme concerns about Hydro-Quebec’s political campaign aimed at influencing the outcome of a citizen-initiated ballot measure this November. Hydro-Quebec’s political committee, the Hydro-Quebec Maine Partnership, is on track to spend more than \$10 million in an effort to defeat a ballot measure against construction of the Central Maine Power (CMP) corridor – a 145-mile transmission line that would deliver electricity from Quebec to Massachusetts ratepayers through western Maine forestland.

We respectfully request that Hydro-Quebec cease all further campaign activities in Maine and let the people of Maine vote without further meddling in our elections.

As you know, unlike in many other states, Maine ethics law currently does not explicitly prohibit government-owned corporations like Hydro-Quebec from engaging in our elections. This oversight in our laws has never been a concern because Maine voters have never previously been the target of a multi-million-dollar campaign by a foreign government-owned corporation like Hydro-Quebec. However, due to Hydro-Quebec's unprecedented and aggressive lobby campaign, Maine lawmakers, including several of the signatories to this letter, were in the process of considering legislation to close this loophole before the pandemic required the Legislature to abruptly adjourn.

Because Hydro-Quebec is a Crown Corporation, wholly owned by the Province of Quebec, the government and residents of Quebec have a direct financial interest in Hydro-Quebec's profit-making enterprises. This stands in marked contrast with any *private* company based in Maine that may have foreign owners. In such cases, the residents of those foreign countries have no financial interest in the outcome of a Maine election.

Hydro-Quebec provides billions of dollars annually to its sole shareholder, the Province of Quebec, which means that the residents of Quebec have a direct financial stake in the outcome of the CMP corridor referendum. Hydro-Quebec reportedly stands to receive \$12.4 billion in profits from the CMP corridor project over 20 years. However, the residents of Quebec are distant from Maine and unlikely to understand the impacts this project would have on the western Maine forestlands. We believe the residents of Quebec are likely also unaware of the extent to which Hydro-Quebec is exploiting the loophole in Maine's ethics laws to advance this project, and the inaccuracies and deceptions pursued by Hydro-Quebec in its political advertising campaign.

One of the central issues for Maine regulators and policymakers in evaluating the merits of the CMP corridor has been whether the project would provide verifiable, additional reductions in *global* greenhouse gas emissions. No representative of Hydro-Quebec ever appeared in Maine under oath to answer questions about this central issue. Hydro-Quebec similarly evaded testimony on this subject during consideration of the Northern Pass Project in New Hampshire. Hydro-Quebec did, however, hire a lobbying firm that helped defeat legislation in Maine that would have required an independent study of the climate impacts of the project.

The only time that Hydro-Quebec has sent a representative to speak before a legislative committee in Maine was when Hydro-Quebec General Counsel, Francois Ramsay, appeared in March 2020, to testify against a bill (LD 2136) to close the loophole in Maine ethics law that allows Hydro-Quebec to create a campaign committee aimed at affecting the opinion of Maine voters on a citizen-initiated referendum.

During that testimony, Monsieur Ramsay claimed that prohibiting foreign government-owned corporations from engaging in referendum campaigns in Maine would be "a serious disservice to Mainers because it would prohibit the very information that is needed by the public to make an informed decision."

In fact, we believe that the real disservice and the affront to Maine voters is the specious campaign being waged by Hydro-Quebec.

- To deceive Maine voters into thinking that Hydro-Quebec's influence campaign is run by a U.S.-based company, Hydro-Quebec earlier this year changed the Montreal, Quebec, address listed on its campaign materials to Hartford, Connecticut.
- To manipulate Maine voters, Hydro-Quebec's advertising campaign has used images of Baxter State Park and Acadia National Park to intentionally exploit the emotional attachment that Mainers have for these locations and imply that the managers of these areas are in partnership with Hydro-Quebec or somehow support the CMP corridor – which is not accurate.
- To misinform Maine voters, Hydro-Quebec has used an image in its ads of belching smokestacks unlike any that exist in the northeastern United States, let alone New England, suggesting that the CMP corridor will terminate such not-actually-in-New-England sources of air pollution.
- In violation of Maine's ethics laws, Hydro-Quebec was fined \$35,000 for failing to register with the Maine Ethics Commission before spending \$100,000 on its campaign aimed at Maine voters. This was the second-largest campaign violation fine in Maine history. Hydro-Quebec issued a news release promising to no longer make reporting mistakes, yet mistakes keep happening. Hydro-Quebec's campaign filings repeatedly list a Maine-based consultant, Blaze Partners, as being in Charleston, South Carolina.

But the real affront to Maine voters is the massive \$6.5 million that Hydro-Quebec has already spent on this campaign, and the escalation of spending now underway, as demonstrated by the hiring of one of the nation's priciest campaign consulting firms, Forbes-Tate, to serve as an agent, registered with the U.S. Justice Department, of a foreign government-owned corporation, Hydro-Quebec.

If the shoe were on the other foot and Maine voters were directly connected with a campaign to overturn public opinion on a construction project in Quebec, we would hear protests from the people of Quebec. But the shoe is on our foot, and we are not comfortable with it.

In 2018, Canada amended its own election laws to prohibit foreign entities from spending money to influence elections. As a result, it is illegal for foreign entities to attempt to influence elections in Quebec even as Quebec is attempting to influence an election in Maine.

As current and former representatives of the people of Maine, we feel compelled to request that Hydro-Quebec cease its campaign operations in Maine aimed at trying to manipulate Maine people into accepting a project that all public opinion surveys show they don't want.

We request that you honor the intelligence and rights of Maine voters to decide the fate of the CMP corridor project without foreign government influence from Hydro-Quebec, a Crown Corporation.

Sincerely,

Rep. Kent Ackley of Monmouth

Rep. Donna Bailey of Saco

Rep. Pinny Beebe-Center of Rockland

Rep. Seth Berry of Bowdoinham

Rep. Jan Dodge of Belfast
Rep. Victoria Doudera of Camden
Rep. Jeff Evangelos of Friendship
Rep. Richard Farnsworth of Portland
Rep. Lori Gramlich of Old Orchard Beach
Rep. Nicole Grohoski of Ellsworth
Rep. Allison Hepler of Woolwich
Rep. Christopher Kessler of South Portland
Rep. Chloe Maxmin of Nobleboro
Rep. Joyce “Jay” McCreight of Harpswell
Rep. Sarah Pebworth of Blue Hill
Rep. Denise Tepler of Topsham
Rep. Ryan Tipping of Orono
Rep. Stan Zeigler of Montville
Sen. Shenna Bellows of Kennebec County
Sen. Brownie Carson of Cumberland County
Sen. Justin Chenette of York County
Sen. David Miramant of Knox County
Sen. Linda Sanborn of Cumberland County
Former Republican Senate President Rick Bennett of Oxford County
Former Republican Senator Tom Saviello of Franklin County

Examples of Hydro-Quebec Campaign Ads of Concern to Maine Lawmakers

Hydro-Quebec ad image of Baxter State Park; [Friends of Baxter State Park](#) strongly objected to this ad
Bangor Daily News, Portland Press Herald, Kennebec Journal, and Morning Sentinel Feb 28, 2020, A4



Hydro-Quebec ad with image of Acadia National Park
Multiple dates and newspapers, including Portland Press Herald April 14, 2020, A3

PAID ADVERTISEMENT

 **Maine**

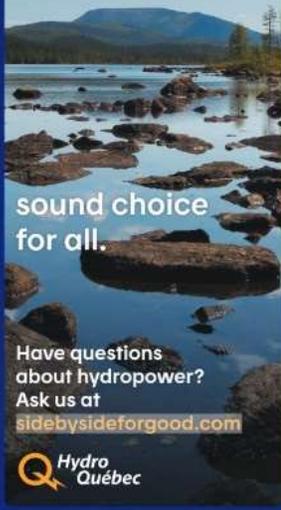


Clean, renewable energy is a

Clean, renewable hydropower from Québec helps reduce our dependency on fossil fuels and the dirty emissions they generate.

Paid for and authorized by the Hydro-Québec/Maine Partnership
225 Bayham Street, 27th Floor, Hartford, CT 06103
Jean Laporte, Treasurer

 **Québec**



sound choice for all.

Have questions about hydropower? Ask us at sidebysideforgood.com

 **Hydro Québec**

Hydro-Quebec ad with image of polluting smokestacks that do not exist in New England
Multiple times in Maine papers, including Bangor Daily News June 9, 2020 pg A3



It's time for clean.

The Clean Energy Corridor will replace oil and gas with clean, renewable hydropower. It will cut 3 million tons of dirty emissions every year, resulting in less pollution and cleaner air and water in Maine. When it comes to a cleaner environment, the Clean Energy Corridor is part of the solution, today and for generations to come.

PAID for and authorized by the Hydro-Québec/Maine Partnership, 225 Bayham Street, 27th Floor, Hartford, CT 06103, Jean Laporte, Treasurer



To learn more about the Clean Energy Corridor, visit sidebysideforgood.com

 **Hydro Québec**