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A step toward reform

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It should have been approved last year, and there are still months to go before the measure comes before Toronto City Council, but a key municipal election reform appears to be back on the rails.

The city's executive committee voted Monday to have staff prepare a draft bylaw that would ban corporate and union donations to municipal election campaigns. The proposed ban – already in effect for federal elections – is to go to city council for a final decision in September. That would allow it to be in place in time for the 2010 election. While a majority of councillors might yet balk at approving this reform, they would run the risk of criticism for doing so.

"The jig is up," Councillor Michael Walker, a long-time proponent of the reform, said in an interview yesterday.

Councillors insist that they grant no favours to their corporate and union donors, but the perception of special influence is unavoidable. That's why Mayor David Miller, along with several councillors, voluntarily declined to accept corporate and union donations in the last municipal election. Not everyone, however, can be counted on to do the right thing. Hence the need for a bylaw.

Unfortunately, other municipalities cannot follow suit as they don't have the special powers granted to Toronto by the province. The province could, of course, mandate a ban on corporate and union donations in *all* municipal elections. But the Queen's Park Liberals, dependent as they are on such donations in provincial elections, are most unlikely to do so.