

## Funding elections

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### *Council looks at banning corporate and union contributions*

By [Kris Scheuer](#)

After years of debate, city council is once again considering banning corporate and union donations to candidates in municipal election campaigns.

Looking at the last election, the percentage of funding Toronto councillors took from developers, corporations and unions varies widely.

In the 2006 campaign, eight councillors including Karen Stintz and Michael Walker raised all their funds through individuals. Mayor David Miller also raised his \$1,029,300 through 1,770 donations from individuals.

On the other side of the scale, councillor Frances Nunziata relied the most on corporations with 72 percent of her campaign financed through these donations.

Local councillors Cliff Jenkins and Denzil Minnan-Wong are on opposite sides of the debate.

Jenkins campaigned on the very issue in the 2003 election and has since taken up the lead with Walker, who's been pushing for reforms since 2001.

"It's one of the issues that got me to run in 2003 election," said Jenkins on Jan. 27.

He mentions the MFP computer leasing scandal and subsequent inquiry that was taking place at that time.

It looked at how contracts were awarded and when politicians were given perks by firms seeking to do business with the city. There were also allegations of bribes to a former city councillor.

"I made a pledge if I was elected to make positive changes," he said.

Councillor Jenkins campaigned in both 2003 and 2006 with funds from individuals only.

In the 2003 election there was no incumbent in Ward 25 and Jenkins and Jaye Robinson became the top contenders.

"When it became known I could win, money and cheques started to come in from developers. I sent those back," said Jenkins during a city council break. "I don't think anyone here is taking money corruptly and selling their votes. But I do think people are taking money from special interest groups and the influence becomes undue."

On the flip side Minnan-Wong got the majority of his funds from corporations. He's less convinced banning corporate and union donations will lead to any real change.

"Anyone who believes passing a bylaw that you can ban corporate influence also believes in the tooth fairy," Minnan-Wong said Jan. 27. "It will drive donations underground and make it less transparent."

He refers to the fact that union members and corporate owners will continue to donate as individuals. And says businesses contribute millions in taxes and should be able to participate in the election process.

One group pushing for the reforms is Vote Toronto, which held a press conference Jan. 12 to launch a new report available at [www.votetoronto.ca](http://www.votetoronto.ca).

“I am not cynical enough to think \$750 can buy a politician’s vote,” said Robert MacDermid, a York University associate professor of political science who researched 2006 election funding in 10 municipalities.

But he expressed dismay developers concentrate their donations to high-profile candidates and said electing them makes council more development-friendly.

“What is being taken from democracy is a range of views that would be there without corporate donations,” said MacDermid, whose research tracked \$10 million in donations to 672 candidates.

As a whole, all Toronto candidates, winners and losers, in the 2006 election received 12.1 percent of their funding from corporations compared to 68.2 percent from individuals.

By contrast in Pickering, 76.7 percent of campaign funding came from corporations and 18 percent from individual donors.

Back in 2004, Toronto city council voted to ban corporate and union campaign donations but did not have the power to make the policy change for the 2006 election. The province has since given the city the authority to pass a new bylaw before the 2010 election.

A vote on the new proposal is expected in the fall.

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