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Last week, Toronto City Council was supposed to receive a draft bylaw banning corporate and union donations in municipal election campaigns. It never arrived. And for now, it appears that it is up to the province to deliver meaningful reform of municipal election rules, something it has failed to do previously.

The city's staff did well on this file. An appropriate bylaw was prepared for Toronto's executive committee last month – the final step before moving to full council. But the matter was put on hold after Queen's Park advised the city that province-wide reforms were under "active consideration," with an announcement coming soon.

How soon remains an open question. Time is fast running out, with municipal campaigns formally launching on Jan. 4. Even if the Liberal government at Queen's Park does move forward in this area, it is likely to fall well short of what Toronto set out to do.

After all, the province has failed the city before. In 2004, councillors put self-interest aside and passed a landmark reform package that would have made it harder for incumbents to win re-election. It would have banned corporate and union donations; blocked the creation of huge election war chests, built by banking surplus cash from one campaign for use in another; and required expenditures on fundraising and victory parties to count as election expenses, subject to a cap.

Toronto needed provincial approval to enact those changes – and didn't get it. Premier Dalton McGuinty moved the other way and tilted an already-biased system even further in favour of incumbents by extending their terms in office from three to four years.

No wonder some advocates of municipal election reform remain unconvinced that real change is in the offing. It's up to the provincial Liberals to prove the skeptics wrong. The changes to be announced "soon" should include, at a minimum, a ban on corporate and union donations. Indeed, a truly progressive package would mirror the reforms city councillors approved in 2004.

However, councillors no longer have to rely on the province. Thanks to the McGuinty government's changes to the City of Toronto Act, the city can move unilaterally to ban corporate and union contributions. While it makes sense to wait and see whether the provincial government moves on this file, council ought not to wait forever. If the province declines to act, the bylaw that city staff have prepared should be brought before council for quick approval.