

[Back to Restrict campaign donations, city told](#)

Restrict campaign donations, city told

November 25, 2009

Vanessa Lu

Corporations and unions should be banned from giving campaign donations to would-be city councillors, Toronto's influential executive committee has recommended.

Supporters of the move predict a ban in Toronto will have national repercussions, if the proposal is approved by city council at a special meeting Dec. 2.

"It will set a standard for municipalities across the province and across the country," said Councillor Michael Walker (Ward 22, St. Paul's). He proposed the measure debated Tuesday, among other policies related to the 2010 election, including efforts to improve the outdated voters' list.

Politicians have complained the list is often inaccurate because it is based on property assessment, leaving off many tenants. In the last election, more than 240,000 people were taken off the list.

"I'm outraged," said Mayor David Miller, who lives in the High Park area with many apartment buildings. In fact, in the 2003 election, when he was running for mayor, he was left off the voters' list himself.



Councillor Michael Walker proposed the measure.

DAVID COOPER/TORONTO STAR FILE PHOTO

Miller recalled that in the 1997 megacity vote, in Parkdale, voters waited in line for hours to get on the list and officials ran out of voting forms.

"It brought tears to your eyes if you believe in the democratic process," he said.

The city wants to consider other strategies, including door-to-door canvassing.

The proposed ban on corporate and union donations could face a stiff fight in city council, and Miller, who backs it, said supporters will have to work hard to win the vote.

Under current rules, business owners and union members can contribute once as individuals, and again through their business or union, to a maximum of \$750 per donation.

"If corporations and unions are allowed to donate, some people have more of a say than others," Miller said. "That's not right, and I don't think it's consistent with our democratic goals."

Opponents of a ban said the current system keeps corporate and union donations out in the open, because they are clearly reported in candidates' financial disclosure.

Banning them means donations by union leaders and corporate executives will continue through personal cheques, argued Councillor Howard Moscoe (Ward 15, Eglinton-Lawrence).

Voters can check a city website and easily spot corporate givers to election campaigns. "But you won't if you pass this bylaw," he said. "You will bury those contributions," because many voters won't recognize the names of the executives.