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## Reform city elections

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Four years ago a majority of Toronto city councillors did what many thought they would never do – cast self-interest aside in favour of democratic reforms making their re-election more difficult.

The reforms, which had been recommended by a task force examining local election finance rules, included a ban on corporate and union donations. Incumbents raising large sums – often far in excess of what they could legally spend – would be forbidden from banking these surpluses for use in future campaigns. And some costs, such as lavish campaign parties, would no longer be exempt.

There is ample evidence supporting a tightening of the rules. Councillor Giorgio Mammoliti, for example, burned through more than \$100,000 in the last election despite a \$22,368 cap on spending in his ward. No laws were broken because most of his outlay, including almost \$74,000 for a banquet, did not count as an election cost.

Most political newcomers cannot hope to raise such amounts, which makes it exceptionally difficult to defeat a municipal incumbent. A more even-handed system was the goal of reforms passed by council. But at that time it was up to Queen's Park to implement the changes.

Sadly, Queen's Park failed to act. A cynic might wonder if provincial inertia was correctly anticipated by some councillors who seemed to be selflessly voting for the reforms.

The sincerity of their intentions will be tested in a two-day council session, starting today, where councillors will again have a chance to vote on banning corporate and union donations.

The difference this time is that the measure need no longer go to the province. Amendments to the City of Toronto Act in 2006 gave council itself the necessary power to implement the desired ban.

Such an initiative would normally be sent to committee, where it could be

sidetracked. But with councillors having already decided previously to ban corporate and union donations, that seems unnecessary. A two-thirds vote is required for council to deal immediately with this measure. However, that will not come easily without the endorsement of Mayor David Miller.

The mayor's position, relayed through a spokesperson, is that another vote on a ban would be redundant, since the measure has twice been passed, and is now before the province. But that only makes sense if Miller's preference all along was to punt municipal election reform to Queen's Park instead of actually making it happen.

The mayor's lack of enthusiasm for the initiative is curious, especially since he voluntarily declined to accept corporate and union donations in the last municipal election.

It isn't too late for Miller to replace complacency with leadership. He should encourage councillors to prove the cynics wrong by showing that they are indeed capable of making the right choice.