

# 'Prohibit' special interest donations

## T.O. Councillor Michael Walker proposes ban on corporate, union campaign contributions

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A Toronto councillor wants to ban candidates in municipal elections from accepting donations from corporations and unions.

If Councillor Michael Walker's proposal was in place for the 2006 election, it would have taken \$775,000 from the campaigns of those seeking city council positions.

Walker has been trying to turn off the special interest donation tap for years. But considering several current councillors filled their election war chests with union and corporate donations, Walker admitted it will be an uphill battle to get city council to pass his motion tomorrow.

"I think it's going to be difficult to get it through," the St. Paul's councillor told the Sun yesterday. "But people should note, and the media should note, that those people who vote against it want to continue the old ways of running politics."

If approved, the motion -- seconded by Councillors Cliff Jenkins and Chin Lee -- would ban campaign contributions from corporations and trade unions, starting in the 2010 municipal election. The motion also requires the city clerk to get an update from the province by March about reforms to Ontario's municipal election legislation.

There may be some support as Walker's motion quotes a newspaper article where Councillor and TTC Chairman Adam Giambrone -- who received \$5,450 in union donations -- stated he supported a council-wide ban on corporate and union donations.

According to campaign financing disclosure, city council and mayoral candidates received more than \$775,000 from corporations and unions in the 2006 campaign.

There were 1,283 corporate donations made to council candidates, totalling \$618,699.76. Unions made 201 contributions, donating \$108,625 to council candidates. Those trade unions included the Toronto Civic Employees Union, Local 416, the Toronto Professional Firefighters Association, the Toronto Police Association and the Amalgamated Transit Union, Local 113.

While Mayor David Miller only accepted campaign donations from individuals, opponents Jane Pitfield, Stephen LeDrew and Shaun Bruce received a combined total of \$52,700 in corporate donations, but none from the unions. Walker said the public should be concerned about contributions from special interest groups, arguing they make councillors accountable to donors -- not voters.

"You have an obligation automatically," he insisted. "This problem isn't just municipal, it's provincial and federal."

Current members of council have an advantage when it comes to collecting money from those with special interests, Walker said.

"One of the ways to level the playing field somewhat (for new candidates) is to prohibit (special interests) from making contributions," he said.

Individuals could still contribute to campaigns, Walker said.

"At least you can see their names and then track them."

NOT FIRST TRY

This isn't the first time Walker has tried to reform the city's election financing.

In 2004, council voted 35-8 to end corporate and union donations to candidates in City of Toronto elections, but the Ontario government failed to approve the changes in time for the 2006 campaign. City of Toronto Act now provides Toronto council with the power to change the rules on its own.

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