

[Back to City clamps down on election donors](#)

## City clamps down on election donors

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Toronto city councillors have decided they will no longer accept campaign donations from corporations or unions, putting pressure on the provincial government to ban the practice in all municipalities across Ontario.

"This is kind of a revolutionary day," Councillor Michael Walker, who pushed for the reform, said after the 29-12 vote. "We've broken the dam of resistance."

The decision, which came after a daylong debate, sends a message to other governments, said Robert MacDermid, a York University political science professor and advocate of campaign finance reform.

"The City of Toronto is showing its leadership here," MacDermid told reporters. "It's the first step to get rid of this kind of influence. It's about removing the unfairness and discrimination that's involved in the system that allows corporate owners to give twice, once in their own name, and once through their corporation or corporations."

Wednesday's vote means future candidates will have to rely on individuals to fund their ward campaigns, which typically have a spending limit of around \$40,000. However, council also voted 27-13 to study the feasibility of providing some city funding for campaigns.

Walker said he wants to lobby Ontario Municipal Affairs Minister Jim Watson to push for a similar ban across the province, by changing the Municipal Elections Act.

Mayor David Miller, who does not plan to run for re-election next fall, told council corporate donations create an un-level playing field.

"... let's face it, the amount of money you can raise does have an impact on who gets elected. And if you allow corporate donations, you allow those people who are a small group far more impact on the election than a single person."

Surprisingly, opponents to the ban spanned the political spectrum, including Councillors Denzil Minnan-Wong (Ward 34, Don Valley East) and Howard Moscoe (Ward 15, Eglinton-Lawrence), who argued corporate donations would simply go underground, under individual names.

"It creates less transparency," said Minnan-Wong, who noted that in the 2006 mayoral campaign Miller, who voluntarily declined corporate donations, actually did receive donations from developers. "Many of these names would not be familiar to most of the public."

Councillor Maria Augimeri (Ward 9, York Centre) called the ban "a sham and a farce," because campaigns could still accept help from union volunteers or staff loaned from businesses.

Without union and corporate donations, she said, past candidates in working-class neighbourhoods like her ward would not have been able to run successful campaigns.

Councillor Suzan Hall (Ward 1, Etobicoke North) argued that if a councillor has received a corporate donation, people think they can judge "whether you are corrupt."

"I don't think that's the case. Anyone around this table would be foolish to jeopardize their integrity on the basis that somebody gave them a few dollars," she said. (Donors can donate up to \$750 to a campaign.) "That is not a large amount of money to sell your soul for."

Councillor Cliff Jenkins (Ward 25, Don Valley West), who pushed the ban along with Walker and Councillor Chin Lee (Ward 41, Scarborough-Rouge River), asked councillors to listen to their citizens.

"I've never heard someone say: Please, please keep corporate and union donations," Jenkins said.

In fact, citizens almost unanimously agree with a ban, he said.

Jenkins said corporate donors are seeking influence. In 2003, in his ward, there was no incumbent and seven relatively unknown candidates at the start of the campaign, he said. But toward the end of the race, he and one or two others had emerged as front-runners.

"What happened then was I got unsolicited donations from companies that I never knew," he said.

Councillor Adam Vaughan (Ward 20, Trinity-Spadina) said candidates should be required to publish the names of their contributors on the

city website at least one week prior to voting day. Names not published would not qualify for the rebates the city gives to campaign contributors.

Also Wednesday, council voted 25-7 to file complaints with Ontario's ombudsman and the Ontario Human Rights Commission over the alleged failure to ensure tenants are on the voters' list.

The job of enumerating voters falls to the Municipal Property Assessment Corp., a provincial agency. Council was told that knocking on doors to sign up voters has been replaced with a questionnaire that comes in the mail, but few tenants fill them out.

"This is basic democratic rights of people that we're dealing with," said Councillor Howard Moscoe. "They have a right to be on the voters' list."

The council also voted to direct the city-owned Toronto Community Housing Corp. to ensure its tenants are on the voters' list.