

## **OP-ED: ELECTION CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM**

Councillor Michael Walker - St. Paul's, Ward 22

November 22, 2005

### **Money and Elections: It's Time to do the Right thing**

For some years now, residents of North Toronto have been concerned with the perception of wrongdoing at City Hall and the pervasive influence of big money on the decision-making process. The MFP Inquiry was a flash point for this concern; so was the Minto development at Yonge and Eglinton.

Those concerns were at the heart of my proposal, since adopted by City Council, to reform the way politicians raise and spend money during election campaigns. There are three key elements to this proposal, all of which require provincial approval.

#### **Surplus Money and Unfair Incumbency**

In the 2003 Toronto municipal election, with expenditure limits set at approximately \$30,000 per ward, a majority of the elected Councillors exceeded their prescribed spending limits. The surplus money they raised is held in an account, and made available to them in the next election. That creates an unfair advantage for incumbents over newcomer challengers. I proposed that surpluses not spent in the election for which they were raised should become the property of the municipality.

#### **Banning Corporate and Union Donations**

In the last municipal election, most Toronto candidates accepted money from developers, contractors, real estate companies, and lobbying firms, whose 2, 814 collective contributions amounted to a staggering \$ 1.73 million. The problem is the widely held perception that those funds are being offered primarily to curry favour and gain reward or patronage. Quebec and Manitoba have already banned corporate and union contributions during election periods. I propose the same.

#### **An Election Expense is an Election Expense**

Election-related fundraising gatherings and victory celebrations are currently excluded from the calculation of campaign election expenses. The result is that well known candidates are able to spend beyond prescribed limits at soirees that are essentially campaign events in the guise of fundraising. I proposed that these expenditures be included within spending limit calculations.

The message is simple. These reforms will add substantially to our efforts to clean up City Hall. All it takes is the courage to do the right thing. And that challenge now belongs to Premier McGuinty.

Sincerely,

Michael Walker  
Councillor - Ward 22, St. Paul's

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