

Schaefer reiterates position on contributions

Regarding 'Corporate Contributions make business sense' (King Sentinel Weekly 5/26/16) and 'King discusses campaign contributions' (KSW 6/2/16):

There has been incomplete reporting of my motion at council regarding municipal election campaign financing and the ensuing council debate. My motion was to send a letter to the premier and cabinet indicating that the Township supports inclusion of a ban on corporate and union donations to municipal election campaigns in Bill 181. It also included a fall back resolution: if the Province passed the draft bill in its then current state, which included assigning authority to each municipality to initiate such a ban, if they chose to do so, King should initiate process for doing so.

During the debate it was evident that many council members supported the former but few were supportive of the latter, hence I amended my motion to eliminate the latter. The amended motion did pass 5/2. Interestingly, the following day it was announced that draft Bill 181 had been modified in several areas including introducing a province-wide ban on corporate and union donations in municipal elections.

The most significant argument to ban corporate and union donations is the one of perception. It is important for citizens to believe that the decisions rendered by their elected officials is based on the merits or lack thereof of the case and the identified values and beliefs of the decision maker. It's important to believe that the judgment has not been influenced by a donation. I challenge readers to ask themselves what you would think if a decision was made which favoured a business and you learned that the business had funded the election campaign of those who had supported the decision. Do you wonder if perhaps the business received additional attention, or even additional information? Do you wonder if perhaps the business more easily had face time for conversation with persons who were critical to making the decision? Do you wonder if truly the best decision for your community has been made? If you think there could have been influence, you will start to question the legitimacy of the democratic process and over time you will become disengaged. It is argued that such influence does not occur as it is public information as to who funds election campaigns. This is true but the transparency does not reduce the negative impact on perception.

As reported, one of my arguments is that as only individuals vote only individuals should fund election campaigns. One council member who disagrees argues that not allowing a business to contribute is like saying that a business is not allowed to contribute to the community. They also argue that the businesses are their partner. These arguments are simply not valid. Funding an individual election campaign reflects a choice on the part of the donor that they want that specific person to represent them; funding an election campaign is not a contribution to the community. The choice to donate to a campaign is based on what one believes the candidates' value system to be and their capability. There are many opportunities for a business to contribute to the community and such is totally irrelevant to the election campaign of individual candidates. Our businesses can and do make valuable contributions to events such as the various parades and festivals and to new community assets such as the Trisan Centre.

I do agree that banning contributions from corporations and unions does create a hole in terms of funding sources, and I agree that it is not desirable to have a system whereby candidates are largely self-funded. Voters, the individuals living in the communities, must step up to support the democratic process of election campaigns. I strongly believe that there needs to be incentives for such. I very much would like to see the campaign financing incentives at provincial and federal levels to be introduced, namely a tax deduction. As reported, Township staff will be making a report on the subject of possible incentive programs. Already, we do have an option to offer rebates for campaign donations; several municipalities do so already. Alternatively, there is the idea of a tax deduction. If Bill 181 is passed with the ban, the importance of us assessing these alternatives is particularly critical.

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Ward 5 Councillor