



CITY OF KIRKLAND

City Attorney's Office

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www.ci.kirkland.wa.us

MEMORANDUM

To: Dave Ramsay, City Manager

From: Robin S. Jenkinson, City Attorney

Date: March 23, 2009

Subject: Response to Correspondence from Anna Rising Concerning Campaign Finance Reform

RECOMMENDATION

City Council approve the attached response to Anna Rising regarding contribution limits for Kirkland City Council campaigns.

BACKGROUND

The City Council received correspondence from Ms. Rising requesting that the City Council enact limits on campaign contributions for the upcoming election cycle.

From: Anna Rising [mailto:anna.rising@verizon.net]
Sent: Monday, March 02, 2009 11:20 AM
To: KirklandCouncil
Subject: Letter in support of campaign finance reform

March 2, 2009

Dear Mayor Lauinger and Council Members,

This year, there will be four City Council seats on the ballot. To date, no one has registered and so I am hoping that this request is still timely for the Council's consideration.

I am writing to ask that you please enact reasonable limits on campaign contributions to take effect for this upcoming election cycle.

Two years ago, you discussed this issue, and you asked the staff to get back to you with recommendations.

Looking back over the most recent years, the cost of running a Kirkland City Council race has gone beyond practicality. Considering the current state of the economy, it is especially important to realize that our citizens cannot provide this level of support for as many as four local races.

Currently, Kirkland has no limits on campaign contributions or on spending. This is in direct contrast to state and federal legislative races. In addition, King County has limits on campaign funding, as do the cities of Seattle and Richland. While state law leaves it up to the cities to determine if limits should be in place, it is up to us to take that important step in campaign reform.

Consider this:

Expensive campaigns are a barrier to many qualified candidates – We have witnessed recent Kirkland council campaigns with expenditures of approximately \$35,000 per candidate. Many citizens who would be good qualified candidates, who have a commitment to public service, find this to be unachievable – they have no way to gauge their ability to raise that level of funding and lack the personal resources to fund a campaign when competing expenditures are rising in contested campaigns.

Unlimited campaign funding tends to favor special financial interests – especially in a challenged economy, candidates who are favored by large organizations will receive significant infusions of financial support. The contributions of neighbors and friends pale by comparison. And to be fair, all interests are special interests – however when those funding sources are significant and come largely from outside of Kirkland, the motivations and expectations are more likely to be future financial reward than simple benevolence or true concern for the future of Kirkland and its citizens.

Practical campaigns are greener campaigns – The largest expenditures of many campaigns tend to be printed materials, such as brochures, postcards and other mailings – which are expensive to print and impose a long-term cost to the environment. If campaign funding is limited, it will cause campaign

teams to do more work face-to-face and electronically. Better for the environment and better for the community!

This subject is not new to the Council – you discussed this subject in March 2007. At that time, the Council reached consensus on some issues:

- Council was generally in favor of the concept of campaign finance limits. At that meeting, all comments were favorable and none of the Council members expressed opposition.
- Council did not want this to be an administrative burden, and determined that the City would rely on the filings that are already required by the Public Disclosure Commission.
- You were generally more in favor of per-donee limitations such as what Seattle has in place, but were also open to knowing more about an overall spending limit concept.
- There were concerns expressed about community groups who might send out their own mailings that would not be covered by these limits, but you acknowledged that this type of problem is out of your control, such as is true for other campaigns.

At the conclusion of your discussion, you asked the Staff to bring recommendations back to you sometime in the next year. As far as I can tell, that never happened – and I have to wonder, why not?. This is such an important issue (nationally as well as locally) that it deserves to be discussed now and not left for consideration at some future time.

City Council elections should be about electing qualified candidates to office. Even in a robust economy, more of the time and energy of candidates and their teams should be spent with registered voters, citizen to citizen, discussing critical issues which impact our City now and in the future, and less time should be spent soliciting funds and writing applications for funding from well-heeled organizations. This is particularly true in our current economy.

This is the time for the discussion to be re-opened. You have the information from your Staff (see link below), so it should not take much time to get back into it, address the various nuances, and complete this process. Please add this to your calendar for the very near future.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Anna Rising
751 8th Street S.
Kirkland, WA 98033

This is the link for the materials that the City Attorney prepared for you in March 2007:
http://www.ci.kirkland.wa.us/Assets/City+Council/Council+Packets/2007/032007/11a_NewBusiness.pdf

DRAFT

April 8, 2009

Anna Rising
751 8th Street S.
Kirkland, WA 98033

Re: Letter in Support of Campaign Finance Reform

Dear Ms. Rising:

Thank you for your correspondence regarding local campaign finance reform. In your letter, you requested that the City Council enact limits on campaign contributions to take effect for the upcoming election cycle. As you pointed out, the Kirkland City Council has previously expressed interest in contribution limits for Kirkland City Council campaigns.

Following receipt of your letter and additional comment received at the March 3rd meeting, the Council asked that staff return with work previously prepared on this topic. As you are aware, at the April 7th meeting the City Council was presented with a draft ordinance on campaign contribution limitations and an explanatory memorandum.

Again, thank you for your comments and interest in this issue.

Sincerely,
Kirkland City Council

By James L. Lauinger, Mayor