

# ...Portland City Council looks at public campaign finance

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campaign contributions. And the U.S. Supreme Court's *Citizens United* decision in 2010 took the lid off campaign contributions in federal races.

"When a wealthy corporation can call the Oregon Legislature into session for a special tax deal, you know we have an influence problem," said Jeff Anderson at the Nov. 3 Portland City Council hearing. Anderson is president of the Northwest Oregon Labor Council, AFL-CIO, and secretary-treasurer of United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555, the state's largest private sector union. He was referring to a one-day special session called at Nike's request in 2012 in which state lawmakers gave agreed to guarantee Nike a preferential corporate income tax formula for the next 30 years.

"[Nike founder] Phil Knight's recent contribution of \$380,000 to some Oregon legislative candidates dwarfs the largest private sector union in Oregon. ... I find it incredible that thousands of my members can pool their dollars together only to have that amount be offset by a single large donor," Anderson said.

UFCW, Service Employees, Communications Workers of America, and the Oregon Working Families Party worked with



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— Portland Commissioner Amanda Fritz

Common Cause, OSPIRG, NAACP, and other non-profit groups in a coalition to develop the Open and Fair Elections proposal.

In City of Portland elections, it's not uncommon for union political action committees (PACs) to contribute \$1,000, \$10,000 or even more. Candidates who opt into the Open and Fair Elections program wouldn't be allowed to accept money from union PACs or any other kind of PACs. Yet the program would likely play to union strengths, because it would eliminate opposing big contributors while multiplying the influence of small donors. Imagine a fundraiser for a union-endorsed candidate: Thirty rank-and-file members or officers each willing to chip in \$50 would end up generating \$10,500 for a city council candidate's campaign. The Open and Fair ordinance limits "in-kind" contributions such as office space to \$20,000 per elec-

tion, but donations of staff time to supervise volunteers wouldn't count toward that limit. And the ordinance places no restraint on unions' ability to communicate with their own members.

Commissioner Amanda Fritz, who introduced the ordinance, said Open and Accountable Elections is as important to her as the City's paid sick leave ordinance, which she helped pass in 2013.

"The Open and Accountable elections system will address one of the most fundamental challenges we face, which is that many Portlanders don't trust their elected representatives to do the right thing for the right reasons, in part because of the perceived influence of campaign contributions in elections," Fritz said introducing the ordinance.

Fritz is the only person on the five-member city council who came to office thanks to Portland's previous public campaign finance system. Known as

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Voter-Owned Elections, it was enacted in 2005, but had its reputation damaged by several instances of fraud. When it went before voters for approval in 2010, it lost by 1,600 votes out of 210,000 cast.

"I read that vote as Portlanders saying 'Not now, and not this system,' rather than 'Nothing like this ever again,'" Fritz said.

The Open and Fair Elections proposal differs from Voter-Owned Elections in that public funding matches — but doesn't replace — private campaign contributions.

Should it go before voters for approval? Fritz said no, arguing that City Council allocates over \$400 million in discretionary funds every year, and doesn't ask voters to approve each of those appropriations. Also, if Portland residents don't agree with this or any other action of City Council, Fritz said there's a process by which they can col-

lect signatures to refer it to voters, as they did with the decision to fluoridate the City's water. But Commissioner Nick Fish countered that this proposal could be perceived as directly benefiting City Council members, so maybe it should be approved by voters first.

Both the floor and second floor gallery of City Council chambers were packed with supporters of the ordinance, and during several hours of public testimony, no council members said they oppose it. Fritz said Mayor Charlie Hales is supportive of the measure. Fish said he has questions about it. Commissioner Steve Novick raised concerns about the cost of the ordinance while also saying he thinks it might not be generous enough.

Fritz and supporters of the ordinance are soliciting feedback and proposed modifications to the ordinance, and aim to bring it to further hearings and a vote by the end of the year.

## BUY UNION

### Washington farmworkers union ends boycott of Driscolls, Sakuma

A three-year union boycott against Sakuma and Driscoll berries and Häagen Dazs strawberry ice cream is over. In September, Skagit Valley agri-giant Sakuma Berries agreed to allow a union election and recognize and bargain a contract with the union, Familias Unidas por la Justicia (FUJ), if it won. FUJ is a local farmworker union affiliated with Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO. Workers voted 195-58 on Sept. 12 to join FUJ; 377 workers were eligible to vote, and the now-union-represented workforce swells to about 500 at the height of berry-picking season. No state law in Washington governs farmworker unionization, and farmworkers aren't covered by the National Labor Relations Act, so Richard Ahearn, former regional director of the National

Labor Relations Board, agreed to oversee the privately conducted vote count.

Now, negotiations are under way for a first union contract, and FUJ is being assisted in bargaining by Jason Holland, labor attorney with Washington Public Employees Association/United Food and Commercial Workers Local 365. If the two sides fail to reach agreement, Ahearn will also serve as arbitrator, picking whichever side's final offer is most reasonable.

In 2014, the company paid \$850,000 in the largest-ever federal wage and hour lawsuit settlement in Washington. But the boycott was called earlier when the company refused to recognize the union. Most Sakuma Brothers berries are sold and marketed by Driscoll's, based in Watsonville, California.



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