

Notice of Motion, Cr Watts: Call for candidates to voluntarily decline donations from property developers, tobacco, liquor and gambling industries

17 May 2016

Motion

That the Future Melbourne Committee, prior to the 2016 election, acknowledges that in order to promote greater public confidence in Council decision-making post-election, that all candidates seeking election are encouraged to:

1. Voluntarily decline to accept donations, either in cash or in-kind, from any entity trading primarily within the property development industry sector.
2. Voluntarily decline to accept donations, either in cash or in-kind, from any entity trading primarily within the tobacco, liquor or gambling industry sector.

Background

In 2015, New South Wales (NSW) acted to prohibit the property development, tobacco, liquor and gambling industries from making campaign donations. See NSW *Election Funding, Expenditure and Disclosures Act 1981* Division 4A which covers prohibition of donations from property developers or tobacco, liquor or gambling industries.

(http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol_act/efeada1981443/)

Legislative change in relation to donations will not occur in Victoria before the 2016 municipal election. Consequently, Council has a role to play in relation to voluntarily addressing problematic donations.

All those in political life have a responsibility to nurture public confidence in the integrity of our political systems and institutions. This motion presents an opportunity for Council to show leadership in the municipal sector in relation to sources of campaign donations from those industry sectors identified as problematic.

Councillors at the City of Melbourne, the state capital, have an obligation to act in exemplary manner to prevent, as far as possible, further risk to the erosion of public confidence in our electoral system.

In a city such as Melbourne, experiencing high levels of activity in both of the problematic industry sectors cited, candidates accepting donations from these sectors is particularly pernicious. This is likely to reflect badly on the way in which future Council decisions may be influenced and upon the integrity of Council.

During the 2012 Council elections, there was extensive negative media around campaign contributions. Post-election an investigation was undertaken by Victoria's Local Government Inspectorate. The Inspectorate recommended that *'the Council tighten governance procedures to protect the integrity of their decision-making'* (The Age, 3 May 2013) i.e. donations.

Since then, on multiple occasions the Lord Mayoral Team and other Councillors have withdrawn from meetings at times when matters before Council involved donors to their 2012 election campaigns. This has resulted in a loss of quorum which effectively prevents the remaining non-conflicted Councillors from voting to properly represent constituents.

There is justifiable concern in the community that a pattern of 'conflict' leading to loss of quorum related to campaign donations from the property development industry sector and the tobacco, liquor or gambling industry sectors has developed during this term.

Unless donations from the property development sector and from the tobacco, liquor or gambling sectors cease, or at the very least be discouraged, then this regrettable pattern is likely to continue.

Moved: Cr Watts