

August 22, 2005

Akron Beacon Journal

Voice of the People

Link: <http://www.ohio.com/mld/ohio/news/editorial/12432233.htm>

Campaign finance rules need to be enforced

The will of the people of Akron to have meaningful campaign finance reform has yet to be realized. This is the overriding message of our report -- criticized in your July 26 editorial headlined "Finance fumes" -- analyzing the compliance of Akron ward candidates with the 1998 citizen-enacted laws.

The charter amendment, approved overwhelmingly by voters and upheld in federal court, clearly states "no candidate for mayor or at-large" shall accept more than \$300 in campaign contributions from any single source and "no candidate for council ward" shall accept more than \$100. Our position from 1998 to now has always been that these limits applied per election cycle. A candidate is a candidate for a political office one time in any two- or four-year election cycle, depending upon the office. Period.

Our opponents affirmed this fact in their legal submission to federal court by stating: "The Charter Amendment restricted contributions to \$100 every two years for the 10 ward council races and \$300 every four years for the mayoral and at-large council races." These same interests, backed by your editorial, now contradict themselves in saying these provisions all along applied per primary and general election.

The editorial further belittled our efforts to monitor compliance of ward candidates with another provision of the citizen-enacted law: disclosure of contributors' home addresses and primary employer. A vast majority of newspapers nationwide support enhanced contributor disclosure as a means of providing information to voters about who is bankrolling political candidates.

Disclosure sheds light on out-of-town donors -- a reality in Akron politics, as some candidates' donors have been mostly from outside Akron. Disclosure also helps link donors to contracts, which may be low-bid but can quickly transform into huge amounts due to change-order shenanigans.

Our report, at www.afsc.net/ejcampaignfinance.html, was based on examining all submitted candidate campaign finance reports, including amended reports. It documents that several council members complied completely with one or the other of the two main provisions of the campaign finance rules.

It's long past time for the voter-enacted and court-upheld campaign finance rules to be enforced by the city and followed by all candidates.

Greg Coleridge & Warner Mendenhall

American Friends Service Committee

Akron