

Granny D Comes to Akron, Ohio



Granny D, 91, captured the hearts and imaginations of Americans when she walked across the U.S. to demonstrate her concern for the issue of campaign finance reform. She began her walk on January 1, 1999, and after logging 3,200 miles at about 10 miles per day, arrived in Washington, D.C. on February 9, 2000.

On Thursday, October 11, 2001, Granny D came to Akron, Ohio to lead a march to City Hall with the members of the Yes on Issue 7 Campaign. Read more about this historic event below...

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Akron election-finance effort enlists Granny D Mayor dismisses appearance of 91-year-old known for a cross-country walk as 'dog-and-pony show'

BY JULIE WALLACE

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The Akron Clean Money Campaign hopes a tiny woman with national recognition can add some pizzazz to the group's efforts.

Doris Haddock, otherwise known as Granny D, is to appear at a rally today to promote a November ballot issue that would transform the way campaigns for city offices are financed. Haddock is best-known for her walk across the country in 1999 and 2000 to promote campaign finance reform.

That she's 91, stands all of 5 feet tall and has become a figurehead for the issue as she traipses about in her trademark straw hat only elevated her appeal to the Akron activists.

"We called her up, and she had an opening in her schedule," said Greg Coleridge of the American Friends Service Committee, a sponsor of the Clean Money Initiative. "We just hope that Granny D will be able to share a first-person account . . . of how average, ordinary people think about campaign finance reform.

"By hearing those stories, those anecdotes, and hopefully hearing and feeling some of her passion, that will rub off on those here to continue this fight, this struggle against the Akron power structure."

Haddock is to lead a march at 3:30 p.m. today from St. Bernard Catholic Church, 44 University Ave., to City Hall. The group is to return to the church for a 5 p.m. rally.

The Akron initiative -- Issue 7 on the Nov. 6 ballot -- seeks to create a taxpayer-financed system for candidates for mayor and the City Council. Similar measures have been passed in four states and are in place for state-level elected positions there, but Akron would be the first city to enact the system if voters approve it.

And although the measure has an active group of supporters, it also has generated its share of criticism.

The city council -- as it did when the issue was defeated in November 2000 -- placed a 0.1-mill levy on the Nov. 6 ballot as a countermeasure.

Council members said the levy would be needed because the funding source provided for in the initiative -- pulling money from the budgets of the mayor and the council -- wouldn't cover the cost of the plan.

Members of the Clean Money Initiative, however, label the levy a scare tactic or poison pill designed to thwart their efforts. They filed a complaint with the Ohio Elections Commission against Mayor Don Plusquellic, accusing him of making misleading statements -- a complaint that was dismissed after it was determined to be unfounded when it was reviewed last week.

Plusquellic, meanwhile, isn't buying into the hoopla surrounding Haddock's visit. It won't officially be "Granny D Day" in Akron, as the group says it requested, and he won't meet with her to discuss Issue 7.

It's not that he has anything against Haddock. Rather, the mayor says, Coleridge is simply using her to create a media event. Besides, Plusquellic said, he never received an invitation to meet her. Coleridge is "going to try and take advantage of this good will she's built up, and I'm not going to be part of the dog-and-pony show to help hype his lies and his misleading statements," Plusquellic said. "If she wants to be connected to that type of group, that's her choice."

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Granny D' thrown out of Akron mayor's office

10/12/01

Martin Stolz

Plain Dealer Reporter

Akron

- Doris "Granny D" Haddock, a 91-year-old grandmother who favors elaborate hats, walked 3,200 miles from Los Angeles to Washington, D.C., to lobby for campaign finance reform. But when Haddock dropped by Akron City Hall yesterday, a city official reacted angrily, summoning police officers to evict Granny D and about 70 others. About 15 police escorted the crowd, mostly senior citizens, as they sang "America the Beautiful."

They were at City Hall in favor of Issue 7, a campaign finance reform proposal on the November ballot. At the time, Mayor Don Plusquellic was attending a scheduled meeting of Akron Tomorrow, a business roundtable, said Laraine Duncan, the mayor's spokeswoman.

Jeff Wilhite, Plusquellic's chief of staff, angrily ordered the demonstrators out of the mayor's office.

The mayor, known for his prowess at soliciting campaign contributions, and City Council have been working to defeat Issue 7 by coupling it with Issue 6, a \$2.9 million property tax. Plusquellic contends that the city would need Issue 6 money to pay for the publicly financed campaigns.

"That was interesting," Haddock said sarcastically after being escorted from City Hall. "The people have been begging to talk to the mayor, and what do they get? Kicked out of the office."

Issue 7 would offer public financing of election campaigns to candidates who voluntarily pledge not to solicit or accept contributions. In return, a candidate can be reimbursed for a set amount of legal campaign expenses - up to \$5,000 for ward council seats, \$25,000 for at-large council and \$50,000

for mayor.

If the issue is approved, Akron would become the first municipality in the United States to enact full public financing of candidates, said Nick Nyhart of Public Campaign, a national organization in Washington that promotes public financing.

Entrenched incumbents such as Plusquellic - who last faced a serious challenger in 1989 - fiercely oppose public-financing initiatives and fear increased competition, Nyhart said.

Part of what has motivated proponents in Akron has been Summit County's corruption scandals of recent years, said Greg Coleridge of the Akron Clean Money Campaign.

The most recent case involved Raymond Kapper, a fixture of Akron government who served as City Council president and service director. In August, Kapper pleaded guilty to receiving \$484,000 in contracts while serving on two county boards.

Coleridge called the \$2.9 million property tax a "poison pill" intended to kill interest in public financing.

For the 2001 election cycle for at-large and ward council seats, public financing for all 28 candidates in contested party primary races would have cost \$190,000. "The money is a bogus issue," said Nyhart. Plusquellic's 1 mill property tax in Issue 6 contradicts the language in Issue 7, the voter initiative. He denied that tax was a "poison pill." "It sounds like a lot of money, but \$50,000?" Plusquellic said weeks ago. "It's a joke."

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