



# CITY OF PITTSBURGH

"America's Most Livable City"

*Office of Mayor Luke Ravenstahl*

June 9, 2008

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CITY CLERKS OFFICE

President and Members of City Council  
510 City-County Building  
414 Grant Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Dear President and Members of City Council:

By way of this communication, I hereby veto City Council Bill #2008-0026. The ordinance purports to stand for campaign finance reform, an important subject which we all agree must be addressed. However addressing an important topic alone does not make for good legislation for we must view the ordinance in its entirety in order to ensure that meaningful reform is achieved. There is an old saying that applies to this bill: don't judge a book by its cover. Likewise we must not accept this bill simply because its title speaks of reform. We must dig deeper, read its content and explore its true meaning and consequences. The ordinance before me today is fraught with problems. It provides an unfair competitive advantage for the wealthy and will have a chilling effect on the labor movement. It will inhibit the ability of challengers to mount successful campaigns against incumbents. Further it does not provide a level playing field between city, county and state office holders. It is clear to me that campaign finance reform, both carefully thought out and created by the appropriate governing body, is needed. Unfortunately 2008-0026 creates more problems than it solves and must be reworked.

Perhaps the most obvious problem with bill 2008-0026 is the fact that it provides wealthy individuals with the ability to circumvent the proposed rules to their own benefit by contributing unlimited amounts from their own coffers. Under the proposed ordinance a wealthy candidate can contribute up to \$250,000 of their own money without consequences. After the first \$250,000 a wealthy individual can contribute unlimited amounts while all other contributors have a modest increase to the limits they can give. This is problematic in several respects. First, it creates a system where the wealthiest among us can self-finance a campaign leaving the citizens of Pittsburgh severely handicapped in their ability to raise funds to defeat a millionaire candidate. What message are we sending when our "best" efforts result in rules that give only the wealthy unprecedented advantages? Second, the lack of limits on the wealthy combined with the cap on the ability of labor organizations to promote candidates who share their vision is an incredible

disadvantage for the labor movement and harmful to what Pittsburgh has worked so hard to achieve in an increasingly outsourced world.

Under the ordinance while the wealthy can give unlimited amounts, labor organizations, which represent hundreds, even thousands of workers, are limited to \$5,000. Pittsburgh stands out as one of the birthplaces of the labor movement in our great country and this legislation effectively silences the working men and women whose primary political voice is derived from the labor unions that represent them. This bill allows one individual to contribute many multiples more to a political campaign than a labor union Political Action Committee (PAC). However, it does not allow for PAC contribution levels to increase alongside of those afforded individuals. Consider the following real-world hypothetical. Last year, the bill's sponsor received a \$50,000 contribution from a wealthy private citizen whose business specializes in outsourcing work to Asia. Assume for the moment that the contributor, instead, decided to seek higher office, running on an anti-labor platform and self-financing the entire campaign. Under the current bill, the labor community, whose funds are raised at the small dollar level from working men and women, and distributed through PACs, would be forced to find 50 PACs to contribute at the maximum levels proscribed by this bill to match the wealthy, anti-labor candidate. This is simply unacceptable and a consequence, unintended or not, that we cannot afford in our ongoing efforts to seek fair wages and standards for the workers of this region.

Another fatal flaw of the proposed ordinance is its effect on potential challengers to incumbent candidates. Last year's elections saw an unprecedented event in recent history with three challengers winning seats on City Council against incumbents. A review of the campaign finance reports shows that each challenger, now a sitting City Council member and proponent of this bill, received contributions from a limited number of contributors in amounts exceeding those prescribed by this bill. One member received contributions from individuals in the amount of \$5,000, \$5,000 and even \$15,000. Another member received contributions from individuals in the amount of \$2,500, \$2,500, \$2,500, \$2,600, \$3,000, \$3,200, \$3,500, \$4,375, \$5,000 and \$5,000. The third member received contributions from individuals in the amount of \$5,500 and \$12,500. I do not fault these members for accepting such checks in their efforts to defeat incumbent City Council members. It is extremely difficult for challengers to run against incumbents who have the opportunity to amass large campaign fund balances over the course of years and years in office. Had the rules outlined in 2008-0026 been in place at the time of these contests it is unlikely the challengers would have prevailed in what ultimately were narrow victories. These same members voted in support of 2008-0026 which would stifle future challenges that they benefited from just one year ago.

Furthermore, it is my belief that worthwhile campaign finance reform can only be achieved by creating a statewide standard focused on leveling the playing field for all Pennsylvanians. I commend Councilman Jim Motznik for sponsoring and City Council as a whole for supporting City Council Bill #2008-0496, which urges the state legislature to adopt statewide campaign finance reform. As pointed

out by various members of City Council when this important debate began to unfold, there must be uniformity between office holders to enact meaningful campaign finance reform. Under the terms of this bill, elected officials and candidates who either represent or seek to represent City of Pittsburgh residents at the County and Commonwealth levels of government would be able to seek contributions without limit in advance of the covered election while City office holders would be held to a different standard. Elected officials raise funds not only to run for the right to represent their constituents, but often keep funds on hand, through the course of time, to seek higher office. Consider a member of City Council who aspires to become a state office holder. Now consider a race between that member of City Council and a longtime member of County Council for the same seat, both running against a longstanding incumbent state office holder. The state office holder will have been able to raise dollars at unlimited levels for years under state rules as an incumbent. The County Council member would be able to amass a "war chest", over time, without limits, which could be applied to the race for the state office. The City office holder, conversely, will be limited by his or her inability to raise funds at the same levels over time providing an unfair disadvantage in the race. I cannot support a bill that will harm City office holders, and in turn city residents, in future races against County and State office holders, especially when the voice of the City and those who understand City government is so vital to the interests of our residents and of Pittsburgh.

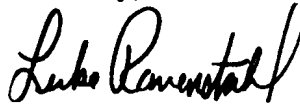
While this bill's sponsor suggests that this is real campaign finance reform, quality legislation would treat each office separately. 2008-0026 intends to create the same restrictions for eleven elected offices that are fundamentally different. Quality legislation would treat each office differently. As you well know, you each represent and are elected by citizens in districts roughly one ninth the size of the city. As such, it would follow that campaign finance legislation would create contribution limitations that reflect this inherent difference between the offices of City Council and those of Mayor and City Controller. True reform would cap City Council races at one ninth of what may be contributed in races for citywide offices.

This concept is not just logical, it is also practical. Historically, the victor in a City Council race raises and spends no more than \$100,000. Legitimate contenders in a race for citywide office often need to raise and spend ten times that amount. The failure of this bill to address the inherent differences between candidates for City Council and citywide offices hints that this bill is not about good government or even the sponsor's stated intent to end a so-called "pay to play" system. Rather, this failure creates the appearance that this is simply designed to impact the rules for the race for Mayor.

I embrace campaign finance reform. While this bill is too fatally flawed to enact as a law, as an advocate of campaign finance reform there are many components that I would like to see as part of a future bill. Specifically we should strive for an open and transparent process. Full disclosure of who is giving what to whom, without a dollar amount attached, must be at its core. We must share which donors are doing business with the city to end unfounded suspicions of a "pay to

play” culture. We must seek to advocate for true reform on a statewide level, uniform throughout both the county and the Commonwealth. The title of this bill – campaign finance reform – is a common goal that we can work towards. We, however, must recognize that a title alone does not make for good reform. I have judged this book not just by its cover, but by its contents and hereby reject it with this veto. Let us continue to work together on this issue to create a brighter future for the City. I ask that you accept this veto and refocus your efforts on much needed statewide campaign finance reform.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Luke Ravenstahl". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Luke" and last name "Ravenstahl" clearly legible.

Luke Ravenstahl  
Mayor, City of Pittsburgh