

City of Long Beach
Working Together to Serve



James Johnson
Councilmember, 7th District

Date: 9/7/2010

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Councilmember James Johnson, Seventh District
Councilmember Steven Neal, Ninth District *J. J.*

Subject: Increasing the Transparency of Independent Expenditures in City Elections

RECOMMENDATION

Request the City Clerk to implement a program to make campaign-related independent contributions and expenditures readily available to the public online as well as by request at City Hall.

DISCUSSION

Proper disclosure and transparency of campaign contributions and expenditures is a vital component of our democratic process, as it allows members of the public to identify those who finance elections and understand who supports or opposes candidates for elected office. In the City of Long Beach, we currently have an excellent system in place for campaign contributions and expenditures, as all such financing is reported online at www2.longbeach.gov/efs for the media and members of the public to examine.

However, currently such financing information related to "independent expenditures"—those expenditures made not by a candidate but by independent groups—is not reported online. This makes it more difficult for the public to be adequately informed about such spending. This lack of transparency is particularly troubling given the large amount of money being spent by independent groups. For example, as of 8/27/2010, there were \$547,345.45 in independent expenditures for the 2010 April and June elections for City Council offices. In comparison, \$526,989.65 was spent by City Council candidates themselves in those elections.

The City Clerk has indicated that independent expenditures can be posted online without significant expense or staff time if the City Council desires to do so.

Therefore, the City Council should request the City Clerk to make this financing information available online as part of our continued efforts to make increase the transparency of our local government.

TIMING CONSIDERATIONS

This item is not time-sensitive.

FISCAL IMPACT

City Clerk staff has indicated that the information currently required to be provided in hard copy can be made available online without significant cost.