

Inquiry Commissioner Marie-Josée Hogue's report "cited intelligence suggesting a proxy agent of the government of India 'may have attempted' to secretly give money to unnamed candidates in the 2021 federal election."<sup>1</sup>

But corporate power far overshadows the effects of foreign agent meddling in North American elections. Can there be a more brazen example of money in politics than the world's wealthiest man, Elon Musk, funding most of the Trump campaign's ground game with a \$75M donation to America PAC?<sup>2</sup>

And that corporate power is on full display here in Ontario. Our provincial government has, under both the Cons and the Libs before them, struggled to free itself from the stain of undue influence by the wealthy. Many are the occasions when Doug Ford has acted against the public interest while pandering to his big money financiers. Before him, the Wynn Liberals scandalized us by assigning their cabinet ministers fundraising quotas.<sup>3</sup> With her connections to Mississauga developers, Bonnie Crombie's Liberal party can be expected to continue the gravy train.

Corporations have no right to make political contributions to candidates. This principle was expressed in law when corporate contributions were banned from federal campaigns in 2007. They were banned from Toronto's City elections in 2009. And in 2016, the Wynn Liberals banned them in provincial and municipal campaigns. But the flow of corporate dollars into municipal campaigns continued unabated. Studies in Toronto by the Toronto Star and in Ottawa by Horizon Ottawa have shown corporate donations funnelling through company executives and their families. In Ottawa's 2018 municipal election, successful campaigns received, on average, 46% of their donations from the development industry.<sup>4</sup>

We need not look far to see the corrosive effects of this influence on Ontario's housing affordability crisis. According to Ottawa Mayoral candidate Catherine McKenney's 2022 Housing Affordability platform, "For every new unit of community housing we build in Ottawa we lose another seven in the private market, resulting in the loss of housing for many through renovictions and demovictions." Without effective, unbiased regulation, the development industry will continue to build for profit, with the public interest served as an afterthought. And for City Hall to effectively regulate the industry, free from undue corporate influence, developer-connected donations to municipal campaigns must be brought under control.

There is now a popular and well documented means of protecting our elections from the twin threats of foreign interference and big money. A campaign finance model that

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<sup>1</sup> [CBC](#)

<sup>2</sup> [The Guardian](#)

<sup>3</sup> [CTV](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Horizon Ottawa](#)

combines Donations Transparency with Small Donor Public Funding was adopted by the Council of Canadians, with national application, in 2022. It was adopted by the Green Party of Ontario at their November 2022 AGM. And the U.S. House of Representatives in 2021 adopted its measures within the For The People Act.<sup>5</sup> Here's how it works:

*Improving donations transparency:* Donations information should be available to voters, journalists and community organizations during the campaign, well before voting day, rather than five months after we vote, as is now the case. Examples abound in U.S. jurisdictions such as FEC, Connecticut, Maryland, California, DC, Berkeley and New York. Looking at New York City's "Follow The Money" system, in operation since 1987, there are 16 donations reporting periods. Additionally, candidates are required to make daily disclosures of contributions and expenditures in excess of a certain threshold during the two weeks leading up to an election.

*Better public funding for campaigns:* In 2018, only 8 of Ontario's 444 municipalities chose to offer rebates. Ottawa was one of them and our rebate system did nothing to solve the problem of big money politics. A tax credit system like the one used for provincial elections would make the problem worse, by allowing the wealthy half their donation back. There is a better way. A system of small donor public funding is now gaining widespread acceptance in 27 U.S. states, counties and municipalities to finance political campaigns.<sup>6</sup>

Most small donor programs share these characteristics:

- *qualifying thresholds:* to ensure that only serious, competitive candidates have access to public funds, all candidates must first demonstrate public support for their campaign by collecting a minimum number and dollar amount of donations.
- *reduced contribution limits:* candidates who choose to participate in a small donor funding program must agree to limit the maximum size of contribution they will accept, to keep the big money out.
- *a cap on public funds:* each participating candidate can earn public funds up to a limit, but can continue raising private funds thereafter.

While suppressing the big money, small donor systems also increase voter participation and improve representation of women and people of colour among candidates.<sup>7</sup>

American democracy has never been in greater peril and Canada is not immune from the possible repercussions of next week's presidential election. We should safeguard

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<sup>5</sup> [Wikipedia](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Unpublished](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Ibid.](#)

our elections by combining Donations Transparency with Small Donor Public Funding. Urgent action will help us combat foreign interference and curtail big money influence in our elections.

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