Dark money

By C. Bart Sullivan

Upfront I'd like the community to know that I support Kari Birdseye, as I firmly believe that she is a city council candidate with true integrity and who is not accepting any PAC money. I have met with and spoken to Kari and feel she supports the best balance between business needs, and the needs of our community.

It is unfortunately the era of where outside money can work its way into our local elections without knowledge of where the money is coming from, thus the term "Dark Money." Currently, we know that PACs have been formed to pay for ads and "push polls," using dark money to sway our local election. To date, well over $100,000 of dark money has been contributed for PACs to spend on local candidates. It's sad that candidates have to accept such dark money as in a sense they are selling their integrity.

While each side has a legitimate right to push their interest, using dark money, either directly or indirectly through ads etc., shows that the candidates who accept it lack integrity, as they are letting outside money influence our local elections for potential personal gain through the sources of such dark money.

While I am sure that it seems like part of the game where if the candidate doesn't take the dark money, the other candidate will. However, this shows a deep character flaw. I don't buy the excuse that these candidates don't know who is giving them the money, so the cannot be influenced. That is a bogus argument. Dark money has an agenda and if you accept the money either directly or indirectly, you accept the dark money agenda. Period. Clearly, the candidates that are favored in the ads and "push polls" have taken dark money directly or indirectly and have accepted the dark money agenda.

In addition to accepting dark money, conflicts of interest are very concerning. One candidate, Lionel Largaespada, whom I have met and have had a conversation with, seems like a fine person. However, it's hard not to notice his direct conflict of interest, as Valero is one of his clients. I am very concerned that Lionel will not be able to be a check on Valero's worldwide corporate agenda relative to the needs of the community.

Disappointingly, Christina Strawbridge apparently has teamed up with Lionel, which I think was a big mistake as this shows me that she is probably now being influenced by corporate dark money. Moreover, this change can be shown by her conduct. For example, while Christina voted against crude by rail, it appears based on her comments about the Industrial Safety Ordinance (ISO) that as a city council member she would hesitate on pressing Valero for an ISO to monitor our air quality and promote public safety. That is very unfortunate, as we really need a city council member that can be a check and balance against Valero's corporate agenda.

Remember, while Valero is an important local business, there is no reason that we have to accept their international corporate agenda. It's our duty as citizens to work with local business for our benefit, regardless of the agenda of the corporate office.

As an engineer who has worked in the petroleum refining industry I understand the needs to reduce oil refining production costs. However, working to defeat good regulations just to reduce production costs at the expense of local health and safety is just shortsighted and reckless.

For example, where I worked, we would always have ISO, for nothing else, to protect of our own onsite workforce. In my humble view, ignoring and/or working to defeat local regulations just shows a lack of the ability to innovate, and if you can't innovate to meet such regulations, you should not be in business. Thus, I am wary of candidates that do not understand their role is to protect the community from such lazy and detached corporate policy.

Therefore, for me it is highly important that we have a candidate for city council like Kari, that is sensitive to such issues, and willing to balance local interests against outside corporate and PAC influences.

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