



M U L T I S T A T E

### [Seattle takes aim at Amazon over political spending](#)

The Seattle City Council is scheduled to vote Monday on new campaign finance restrictions that would prevent companies like Amazon from spending money on city elections.

The move comes just months after the tech giant, which is headquartered in Seattle, spent millions trying to oust incumbents who wanted to increase its taxes.

A City Council committee voted Wednesday to advance a bill that would prohibit corporations from contributing to candidates or political action committees spending on local elections if foreign investors own a substantial stake in those companies.

The legislation passed on a 6-0 vote, making it all but certain that the measure would pass through the full nine-member council.

“What we are doing here is addressing corruption and the appearance and perception of corruption in our elections, and that is a worthy challenge to take up as a City Council,” said Lorena Gonzalez (D), the City Council president and the bill’s lead author.

The bill is a direct response to the 2019 elections, in which Amazon and several other large corporations dumped more than \$4 million into independent expenditure groups led by the local Chamber of Commerce, an unheard of sum in usually low-budget city elections. Amazon alone was responsible for \$1.5 million in spending.

Those businesses targeted incumbents and liberal candidates who had supported a so-called head tax on the city’s largest employers. The tax would have fallen on the 585 businesses in the city that generated more than \$20 million in revenue, requiring them to pay \$275 per employee. That money would have been earmarked for affordable housing and homelessness services.

After the City Council passed the head tax in 2018, Amazon openly suggested it would slow its rapid growth in its hometown. The council [reversed course](#) just a month later after angry town

hall meetings and after Amazon, Starbucks and other large corporations began raising money for a ballot measure to overturn the tax.

The massive spending the following year brought national media attention and condemnations from Democratic presidential candidates like Sens. [Elizabeth Warren](#) (D-Mass.) and [Bernie Sanders](#) (I-Vt.). The company succeeded in making the last several weeks of the campaign about itself — and all of its candidates lost.

The winning candidates formed a special Select Committee on Campaign Finance Reform to address the huge spending, and by proxy Amazon's growing political power.

Amazon spokespeople did not return requests for comment on Thursday.

Some council members warned the legislation would not fully curb a corporation's political influence. The bill only limits contributions a corporation makes, not direct spending a corporation does on its own.

"This legislation is about addressing quid pro quo corruption and the threat of it. We shouldn't kid ourselves that it's going to quote get big money out of politics," said Lisa Herbold, one of the council members who voted in favor of the bill.

The ban on corporate contributions would almost certainly draw legal scrutiny, as several of the city's previous attempts to get money out of politics have ended up in court. A spokeswoman for the City Council said council members anticipated a future lawsuit.

### **[Missouri Republican bundles redistricting repeal with other ethics changes](#)**

A western Missouri Republican wants voters to ban lobbyist gifts and further restrict campaign contributions, but that's not all.

Sen. [Dan Hegeman](#), R-Cosby, also wants voters to repeal the redistricting system they approved in 2018 through Amendment 1, or Clean Missouri.

Like Clean Missouri, Hegeman has bundled his redistricting proposal with other items likely popular with voters.

Clean Missouri in 2018 limited lobbyist gifts to \$5, subjected lawmakers to the Sunshine Law, reduced campaign contribution limits, instituted a two-year cooling-off period for

lawmakers-turned-lobbyists, and placed redistricting responsibilities in the hands of a “nonpartisan demographer.”

Republicans have long said Clean Missouri backers disguised controversial redistricting changes by proposing them in tandem with other ethics reforms.

Hegeman’s resolution, which requires approval by the GOP-controlled Senate and House before being placed on the ballot, would ask voters to ban all lobbyist gifts and reduce campaign contribution to Senate candidates from \$2,500 to \$2,000.

He would also place redistricting powers in the hands of a bipartisan commission instead of the nonpartisan demographer.

“This will give voters another opportunity to weigh in on this monumental change,” Hegeman told the Senate Rules Committee on Tuesday.

Opponents have said the measure would give politicians and political parties outsized influence on the redistricting process, encouraging horse-trading and accommodations for incumbents.

They say a bipartisan commission will still exist, and may make changes to the demographer’s map if 70% of members approve.

The current redistricting system gives the Senate majority and minority leaders the ability to choose the nonpartisan demographer once the state auditor forwards completed applications to the Senate.

Senate Majority Leader [Caleb Rowden](#), R-Columbia, and Senate Minority Leader [Gina Walsh](#), D-Bellefontaine Neighbors, said [last week said the hiring process was moving forward](#) for the demographer despite Republican efforts to scrap the position.

On Tuesday, Rowden, who chairs the rules committee, implied none of the six applicants were suited for the role of state demographer.

“You’re going to be sorely disappointed in the candidates,” Rowden told a person who gave testimony in support of the nonpartisan demographer.