

Campaign finance, outside influence causes controversy on campaign trail

Councilor Johnson files finance complaint; mayor warns of 'outside group'

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The past two weeks have been lively in the leadup to the August primary election of Battle Ground city councilors as one candidate received a complaint on funding disclosures filed by a sitting council member while the city's mayor spoke out against a group the candidate says inspired her to run for office.

On July 26 Battle Ground City Council Position 3 candidate Shauna Walters was notified that she had a complaint against her filed with the Public Disclosure Commission which oversees funding in local and state government races in Washington. The complaint was filed by current Position 7 councilor Philip Johnson and alleges two instances where Walters broke rules surrounding how much money she can receive for her campaign.

Specifically, the complaint filed to the PDC points to an instance where Walters collected \$1,000 from one individual and another where she received \$350 from an ostensibly anonymous donation. Both would be violations given the type of filing Walters has done for her campaign, which apart from a \$5,000 cap overall, limits individual donations to \$500 per donor and \$300 for anonymous donations.

Johnson said his complaint stemmed from what he saw on Walters' fundraising page on fundrazr.com, a crowdfunding website.

In Walters' response, she provided documentation that she had reimbursed half of the \$1,000 to have it at the \$500 cap, as well as revealed that the ostensibly anonymous donation was actually from her mother. Walters reasoned her mother was leery to have her name visible on the fundraising website, though the response documents list names with each of the donations.

In an interview with The Reflector, Walters said the \$1,000 donation was a result of her not having set controls on donation amounts with the fundrazr.com website — at the top of the donation page it notes restrictions such as the \$500 limit.

"I put my FundRazr account up on Facebook not honestly thinking



PHOTO BY MARY BROTEN

Battle Ground City Council Position 3 candidate Shauna Walters is introduced by Patriot Prayer leader Joey Gibson at a recent rally in Battle Ground. Although he's not running against her, councilor Philip Johnson filed a complaint against Walters leading up to the primary.

that I was going to get any donations right away," Walters said. Response documents show that she explained to the donor the limits shortly after it was made, though the reimbursement check was not cashed until after the complaint had been filed.

Regarding the alleged violations, Johnson said "honesty matters." He pointed to Walters' stance regarding the voter-approved Initiative 1639 as an example of her not wanting to "follow the rules" of government processes. Walters has been at the forefront of local pushback on the initiative which opponents say infringes on constitutionally-granted rights to bear arms through its new regulations regarding the sale of semiautomatic rifles.

"Like me, she's a veteran. In the Army we had rules, and you followed the rules," Johnson said. "She seems to have a problem with adhering to the rules."

Johnson's seat isn't being challenged by Walters, however, as Josh VanGelder, a fellow member of a group spearheaded by her, the North County Sons and Daughters of Liberty, has taken up the contest against the Position 7 incumbent. Johnson said he hadn't seen any fundraising by VanGelder online to call into question whether or not he had violated PDC rules, which was the case in his decision to file a complaint against Walters.

Johnson said claims made by Walters in a video posted to Facebook July 30 that his complaint

BATTLE GROUND CITY COUNCIL

FIND OUT WHO MAKES THE CUT

The Reflector will have the first results of the August primary election online after the first round of counts is available Tuesday evening. A full report will be available in the Aug. 14 edition. Head to thereflector.com to stay up to date.

was a "political tool" were inaccurate, remarking that saying as much was a generic response from any politician when they "get caught" to frame actions as having ulterior motives.

Walters said she was "definitely shocked" that Johnson would file a complaint without talking to her first, maintaining that she would have personally opened up her books to show the finances if requested.

Johnson pointed to the start of the animosity between him and Walters as a result of past city council meetings where Walters and other members of NCSDL

spoke before council urging the city to make some public stance against I-1639. He was dismissive of Walters' apparent shock at seeing pushback against her campaign, explaining that she should have expected it given how she and other anti-1639 individuals had pushed on council to do something that he in the past has equated to voter nullification.

The controversy over I-1639 has seen involvement locally from gun rights advocates including Patriot Prayer founder Joey Gibson, who has organized rallies at Kiwanis Park and spoke before council at meetings. Gibson's group has often clashed with left-wing protestors in Portland and other cities across the US, often resulting in violence.

Battle Ground Mayor warns of 'fake news'

On July 29, Battle Ground Mayor Mike Dalesandro published a two-minute video to Facebook addressing concerns over the influence of "an outside group" on using the city for its own political gain. He did not name the group but said it was "prone to violent altercations, street fights, nasty rhetoric, simply going around looking to stir up controversy with the goal to turn heads and make headlines."

"Friends, don't fall for the fake news. This is not an organic Battle Ground movement," Dalesandro said.

Though he said he couldn't speak for Dalesandro, Johnson said

he believed the mayor was referring to Patriot Prayer when making his comments. He noted Gibson has been at a number of events alongside Walters, and had made appearances at city council meetings to push for a resolution against I-1639.

"I'm fully convinced that Mr. Gibson might as well be (Walters') campaign manager," Johnson said. He scrutinized both Walters' and VanGelder's association with Gibson further, saying that, "The two of them are agents of his, in my estimation."

Walters took issue with that characterization, though she noted she considered Gibson a friend and an inspiration in getting her to run for office.

"I don't call being inspired by what somebody's message is, being an agent of someone," Walters said. "I stand for myself, I speak for myself."

In a video addressing Dalesandro's own statement, Walters said that rallies with Patriot Prayer at Kiwanis Park had been civil without the violence the mayor was alluding to that had occurred across the river.

Regardless of how the primary election turns out, Johnson expressed worry over Walters' campaign which appeared to be centered around one issue while overlooking broader concerns a councilor would have when leading Battle Ground.

"There are problems in the city that far outpace the worries of 1639," Johnson remarked.

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