

Date 1/12/2010

From: Ben Johnson - 447 Wells Ave N, Renton WA 98057

To: King County Elections Board, Washington State PDC

RE: City of Renton campaigning via mailer enclosed in utility bill

In February 2010, Renton citizens will decide via election on whether to keep their city library system, or annex into the King County Rural Library System (KCLS).

In January 2010, The Renton Utility Department printed and enclosed a letter with the utility bill describing the benefits to the Renton citizens of voting positively for this upcoming election and the dire consequences of what would happen if the election were not be successful.

The letter is heavily biased for voting affirmatively, in both in quantity of content and in reasoning. While on the face of it looks like a list of facts - it is in reality filled with conjecture and intentional falsehoods to such a degree that I feel that it is campaign literature.

I feel this is a violation of Washington State laws prohibiting government agencies using taxpayer funds to produce and distribute campaign materials for the following reasons:

- 1) The letter is heavily biased in quantity of information toward voting in the affirmative.
- 2) The letter contains glaring errors of fact in order to persuade toward voting in the affirmative.
- 3) The letter contains many statements of opinion in order to persuade toward voting in the affirmative.
- 4) The letter compares both potential outcomes, but assumes the best case for the positive and the worst case for the negative.
- 5) The letter uses assumptions about the future when that assumption would damage the anti-annexation argument, but discards that same assumption when discussing positives for annexation.
- 6) The letter implies that the unelected Renton Library Board endorses annexing to KCLS.

Let me expand on these items in detail:

The letter is heavily biased in quantity of information toward voting in the affirmative.

By sheer volume, the discussion of both possibilities is almost a 4 to 1 ratio favoring the pro-annexation side. In addition, the layout of the pro position is enhanced with extra whitespace and is bulleted list format in order to make it easier to read.

The letter contains glaring errors of fact in order to persuade toward voting in the affirmative.

Errors of fact abound:

It is claimed in the letter that “Renton and Enumclaw are the only two cities in King County not part of the King County Library System.” When in fact the largest city in King County is also not part of KCLS. By omitting Seattle, and comparing Renton to Woodinville, the implication is that Renton is somehow not cosmopolitan and needs to join KCLS.

KCLS is introduced by its DBA name of “King County Library System” instead of its true chartered name “King County Rural Library System” in order to distance itself from its rural roots any make it more appealing.

It is stated that KCLS “operating budget” is “more than \$90 million” when in fact that KCLS operations budget for 2010 is significantly under 90 million at \$82,443,729 and their 2009 operations budget is \$83,177,387. This was done to make KCLS look more impressive.

It is stated that “KCLS is a local government entity separate from King County” when in fact the governing body of KCLS is appointed by King County in a process where citizens have no direct vote.

The letter contains many statements of opinion in order to persuade toward voting in the affirmative.

The letter contains many sentences that are opinion and are not facts:

“The role of libraries also has changed, from simply offering books.” This is an opinion and not a fact as differing people will have differing ideas about the roles of libraries.

“The City of Renton would implement reduced branch hours.” This is an opinion and not a fact as Renton has made no specific determination.

“Remaining independent and fully funding the improvements recommended in ... would cost approximately \$260 per year for a \$400,000 home”. This is an opinion and not a fact as Renton has made no formal determination as to the costs of future expanded

library service. Instead of comparing the costs of current service, they compare the KCLS costs to an opinion of what future Renton service may be.

The letter compares both potential outcomes, but assumes the best case for the positive and the worst case for the negative.

While dire predictions are made about the City's ability to pay for continued library service, the fact that KCLS is under the same economic pressure is not mentioned. KCLS has stated in that "KCLS will face 10-15% budget cuts across the organization." if it doesn't get a levy lid increase in the future. As the budgetary problems of the city were mentioned, it would only be factually fair to mention the problems KCLS is having.

The letter makes assumptions about the future for positively for annexation to KCLS while discounting those same assumptions when discussing the negative:

Basically, the letter assumes that the Renton City government will continue to apportion part of the the budget for library services, when in fact the city may or may not do that. It then goes on to lump that apportionment into the tax analysis for remaining out of KCLS, but neglects to keep that same apportionment in the tax analysis for joining KCLS.

The letter implies that the unelected Renton Library Board endorses annexing to KCLS.

The text reads "The Renton City Council and Renton Library Board both endorsed giving Renton voters the chance to decide for themselves whether to join KCLS." Two problems, the unelected Renton Library Board has no business endorsing anything as they are not elected. Secondly a neutral factual sentence would have been "annex to KCLS." rather than "join KCLS" as per the text of the proposition.

...

Given that the letter is is littered with opinion, and powerful balancing facts were either omitted or facts outright falsified in order to advance the pro-annexation position, and this letter was compiled, written and mailed with considerable costs to the taxpayer, I ask that you take appropriate measures to ensure that the City comes in full compliance with campaign finance laws, and to affect any remedies that will ensure that this election is immediately carried out fairly.

