

Spokane voters have spoken

Government collective bargaining talks MUST be public

In the fall of 2019, Spokane voters passed the city charter change known as Proposition 1 with 77% support. It was approved in every precinct of the city.

The concept was simple – **collective bargaining talks with city unions over taxpayer resources should be open and transparent.**

For many years, these negotiations with city unions were conducted in secret. The city council simply got an up or down vote. Even though they would pay the bill, citizens were not informed until the deal was done.

To circumvent the charter change, several city unions rushed to open negotiations on a new contract before December 1st, 2019.

In 2021, however, Spokane has the opportunity to enforce city law and bring much-needed transparency to the process as city union contracts come up for re-negotiation. Collective bargaining transparency is common and routine. Nearly half of the states provide for some level of public access to the collective bargaining process.

The Pullman School District embraces collective bargaining transparency. The district's finance manager Diane Hodge said, "We just think it's fair for all of the members to know what's being offered on both sides."

Since government union contracts account for such a large portion of spending, they should not be negotiated in secret. The public provides the money for these agreements. Taxpayers deserve the right to follow the process and hold government officials accountable. Local media should be allowed to cover the process and inform the public so that citizens can be aware if either side is acting in bad faith. And government employees should be able to see firsthand what offers and counteroffers are being made in their name.

A policy of open public meetings identifies whether one side or the other is being deceptive or unreasonable and reveals who, if anyone, is acting in bad faith.

It is inexcusable that union leadership would resist such a change. The question is – what are they so afraid of?

Sincerely,

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