

April 13, 2015 Whatcom County Charter Review Commission meeting, Beginning at approximately [12:41](#) on the recording:

Ben Elenbaas: Any of you, any of our regular attenders here at the Charter Review know that I have never kept the clock. I just let 'er run. I'm keepin' the clock tonight. I'm gonna make a request. As the chairman, I get to do that, I guess. Is Matt Petryni in the house?

Female voice: He's outside the door

Ben Elenbaas: Could somebody bring him in for me?

Ben Elenbaas: Hi Matt. I...I...it's my understanding that you have a burning issue for the commission ...

Matt Petryni: Yes, I do.

Ben Elenbaas: I would like to give you an opportunity address us first.

Matt Petryni: So I, I don't have all the - like a statement prepared or anything, which is my normal practice, but, my name is Matt Petryni. I am the Clean Energy Program Manager for RE Sources for Sustainable Communities. We are an environmental non-profit organization here in Bellingham. And, we represent over ten thousand members in Whatcom County and I'm submitting comments on their behalf. I'm speaking in opposition to the proposed district-only voting proposal at least as it's currently conceived. The reason we're concerned about this proposal is because it would create a disproportionate representation scheme in our county and make it possible for a minority of the voting public to achieve a majority on our local government. We're concerned that this proposal is supported by the coal industry, and has been created by their strategists as a strategy to make sure that they have a pro-coal majority on the Whatcom County Council which makes the decision over whether or not to build North America's largest coal export terminal here in Whatcom County at Cherry Point. So, we are opposed to that proposal, and as a result, are very concerned that the commission would consider uh, such a proposal to basically move to (indistinguishable word) a disproportionate representation scheme. So that's kind of the issue, and there's, there's some options out there that might make this a little bit more reasonable and we hope you'll look at those and take those under serious consideration, move those forward to the voters as well to be considered. So, that's kind of where we're at. If we, if the commission isn't willing to reconsider this we'll definitely have to take our case directly to the voters, and talk to them about why this isn't a fair way to conduct elections as a community. So, that's pretty much where I stand. Thank you for allowing me the time to speak.

Ben Elenbaas: Mr. Petryni

Matt Petryni: Question?

Ben Elenbaas: Yeah I do. I have a question for you.

Matt Petryni: Yeah.

Ben Elenbaas: So this was your call to action: In 2013 Voters in Whatcom County soundly rejected coal companies' attempts to buy our local elections. To overcome Whatcom County voters rejection of coal interests coal companies are now funding an effort to fundamentally alter how Whatcom County conducts its elections to make it easier for their pro-coal candidates to win....

Elenbaas began reading the RE Sources "Action Alert" at approximately [15:42](#) and was still reading [at 17:04](#)

Matt Petryni or a voice from the commission : Is this a question?

Ben Elenbaas: I'm getting to it. [continues reading]

Audience member: This is a misuse of public hearing. [Ignoring this call-out from the audience member, Ben Elenbaas did not stop reading]

Matt Petryni: Is there a question?

Ben Elenbaas: Yes there is. [continues reading]

Audience Member: What is the question, Ben?

Voice from commission: Ben, ask your question. [Ben Elenbaas continues reading]

Todd Donovan: We've been cut off by you as chairman and we've done far less than that in interrogating.

Elenbaas did not stop reading the rest of the RE Sources "Action Alert", which took until about 18:00 on the recording.

Ben Elenbaas: So this was your call to action?

Matt Petryni: Definitely. What's the question?

Ben Elenbaas: My question is which one of us, or majority of us, are funded by coal or backed by coal companies?

Matt Petryni: Well, I would refer you to the PDC forms for the SAVEWhatcom political action committee which declares all of the support and opposition statements. So you can look it up.

Ben Elenbaas: Someone like myself who didn't take a penny from anybody.

Matt Petryni: Well you may have and not known.

Ben Elenbaas: How did I not know?

Matt Petryni: Well, the, the coal companies put money into the election and they have to declare whether or not they support or oppose certain candidates and so they put money to support certain candidates and those candidates are now on the commission and that is all public record and that's available on the public disclosure commission website.

Ben Elenbaas: So, your concern, your concern is that outside money is influencing elections here in Whatcom County.

[Loud laughing and applause from the audience]

Matt Petryni: My concern is that coal money is influencing elections in Whatcom County.

[Laughter continues]

Ben Elenbaas: No, this, this... is a very important issue for me and these are you know, I don't know if you know but I ran for county council at one time.

Matt Petryni: I do know that. I do remember that.

Ben Elenbaas: And it was very troublesome to me that my opponent had, at about August of the election, he had 52 people who donated over \$100 from outside Whatcom County and outside the state.

Matt Petryni: Was it similarly troublesome that you had similar donations

Voice from commission: Mr Chair. Mr Chair.

Matt Petryni: Was it troublesome that you had similar donations on your side or is it only when your opponent did?

Ben Elenbaas: I had, I had 2 donations from outside Whatcom County. One was a relative and one was a high school friend.

Audience member: This is a public hearing.

Ben Elenbaas [raising his voice]: I'm concerned about this outside money!

[Vice Chair Joe Elenbaas sounds the gavel twice]

Matt Petryni: There's a lot of people here tonight that came out to speak, and I think it would be respectful to them to allow them to speak.

Ben Elenbaas: Environmental activism is a multibillion dollar industry and I'm concerned that, I'm concerned that this is something that you're fundraising with.

Voice from commission: Chair. Chair.

Matt Petryni (to the crowd): Do you guys want an opportunity to speak?