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MAYOR HANCOCK AND COUNCILMAN FLYNN DEFUND FAIR ELECTIONS INSTEAD OF POLICE

Denver, CO -- Councilwoman CdeBaca's statement responding to Mayor Hancock's budget request response letter:

Less than three weeks away from potentially the most impactful election of our lifetime, including a reclamation of our democracy itself, Mayor Hancock has released a tone-deaf response to Denver City Council's proposed 2021 budget amendments. While I applaud his approval of two of my budget amendment recommendations (increased funding for [STAR](#), and \$1 million for Eviction Defense), he intends to fund these programs by pulling money from the Fair Elections Fund—a move that defeats the entire purpose of shifting public safety dollars into community reinvestment programs.

The mayor is essentially holding democracy hostage: granting Council's budget amendments, but only in exchange for the hefty ransom of Denver's brand-new fund to support grassroots candidates. In a year of crisis for our democracy, now more than ever, we must strengthen pro-democracy reforms like the Fair Elections Fund, not gut them. The Fair Elections Fund is an important tool in ensuring our government represents *the people*.

The Fair Elections Fund was a citizen-led, grassroots effort across the City and County of Denver, designed to eliminate the potential for a small number of super-wealthy individuals and corporations to decide which candidates will raise enough money to run the kind of high-priced campaign it takes to win. The fund would match small-dollar donations for candidates running for local office that include Mayor, Auditor, Clerk and Recorder, City Council At-Large and City Council. The measure was passed by a majority of voters in each council district, and it prevailed in every precinct in the city. This is yet another citizen-led initiative that is being watered down and undermined by the Mayor's abuse of his power.

It is unfortunate that my colleague, Councilman Kevin Flynn — who originally and unilaterally proposed the Fair Elections Fund as the source for Council's budget amendments alleging that the fund "only benefits politicians and would-be politicians" — gave the Mayor an out instead of honoring the will of the



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people who want both a level playing field for grassroots candidates and financial restructuring of our public safety priorities.

The Mayor's refusal to re-allocate Denver Police Department budget dollars to better meet the needs of Denver citizens, and instead undercut citizen-led transformational campaign finance reforms is consistent with his recent rhetoric demeaning City Council's referred ballot measures to increase checks and balances of the Mayor's unbalanced and excessive power. The 2021 Fair Elections Fund's proposed budget of \$2,000,000 is 0.8% of the 2021 Denver Police proposed budget of \$230,000,000.

While we witness democracy for sale at the highest level of government, the people of Denver spoke loudly and clearly that they want campaign finance reform. Our Denver elections are not for sale, and we should not accept the Mayor's unilateral decision to sacrifice our first opportunity to fairly fund them.

The 2023 cycle is forecasted to be one of the most active electoral periods in modern memory within the City and County of Denver. We fully expect that the Fair Elections Fund and the record number of term-limited vacancies will lead to the largest candidate pool in modern history. There will be numerous open seats including the office of Mayor, both At-Large City Council seats and several City Council seats due to term limits. Gutting this fund in 2021 makes it much more likely that the Mayor will cut it again in 2022, should Denver not recover as quickly as we hope from the current economic crisis.

Rather than robbing a fund designed to help elect people who will not be beholden to the wealthy special interests, we should be investing in democracy while reimagining policing through our budget priorities.