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## An Open Letter to Spokane Businesses

October 26, 2009

*Re: Proposition 4*

The ballots for this November's election have arrived. For those of you who haven't cast your votes yet, we'd like to explain to you why **we, as Spokane business owners, support Proposition 4 and encourage you to vote yes**. We believe not only in the values of Proposition 4, but we also support the proposed amendments themselves, as they seek to address serious issues in this community in a way that current laws cannot. It is critical, as business people, that we not only strive to keep our businesses economically viable, foster good job opportunities, and contribute in other ways to the community of Spokane, but that we support a shift in the way we address community issues such as healthcare, affordable housing, environmental protections, and neighborhood development, and Proposition 4 addresses all of these concerns.

What we have observed, as business people who have been doing business in Spokane for years, is that we aren't really advocating for local business, the kind of businesses that will help our economy. Instead we keep inviting in outside business, whether it be big-box stores or chains that aren't based in Spokane. This business formula is what is costing Spokane jobs, not Proposition 4. **Big-box stores and other out-of-town chains drive locally owned businesses to shut their doors, as well as shut out local businesses from even being able to compete for the opportunity to deliver the goods and services to run those businesses**. Proposition 4 is about creating a level playing field for local businesses as well as making sure that Spokane money, money we earn as businesses and residents here, stays in the Spokane economy.

The evidence is overwhelming that boosting local business activity boosts the local economy which ultimately makes for a healthier, more sustainable community. Local businesses pay their employees better, offer better benefits, and give more to local charities than out-of-town businesses setting up shop in Spokane. It is important to acknowledge the influence of the "local multiplier" effect and understand that **money spent at locally-owned businesses continues to recirculate at least three times longer in our economy than money spent at non-locally-owned businesses.**

Also, according to a study conducted in Grand Rapids, Michigan (similar in size and demographics to Spokane) if there was just a 10% market shift to local businesses (retail and wholesale), the results would be nearly \$140 million in new economic activity, over 1600 new jobs, and over \$50 million in new wages. We all know this, but we won't actually achieve this kind of economy locally until we start changing the way we do business. Proposition 4 provides a legal tool to begin to put Spokane on a path for creating a healthy, local economy.

As business owners we understand the cost of healthcare and struggle to find ways to provide this benefit to our employees. We support what Proposition 4 would do in providing residents a healthcare option, one which residents will pay the provider directly for those residents unable to qualify or afford healthcare otherwise. This is neither taxpayer funded nor does not burden the city financially. **The plain language states that the only duty on the city is to “guarantee such access by coordinating with area healthcare providers to create affordable fee-for-service programs within eighteen (18) months following adoption of this Charter provision”.** So long as the city acts in good faith, they have done their duty under the law and are not obligated financially to cover healthcare costs of residents.

In regards to development in neighborhoods Prop 4 would simply require that the city adopt a much more fair, and far more efficient standard for granting special interest zone changes. Moreover, **Prop 4 would actually streamline city government's planning and zoning, since there would be more adherence to adopted neighborhood and comprehensive plans.** The prevailing wage and apprenticeship amendment will assure more people a living wage, as it simply extends the current

federal wage provisions on public construction projects to private projects over \$2 million in cost. As with current federal provisions, there is special provision for small-scale residential projects, adopting a two-tier wage structure that works for business, as well as for the citizens

The laws, the amendments in Proposition 4, are very clear as to what needs to change in this community in order to better address these community concerns. **If these laws are challenged it will come mostly from those who don't want to follow those laws**, not those who had their rights violated. The last time this community heard this sort of level of threats of lawsuits was ten years ago when the Human Rights Ordinance was up for consideration by the city council. That ordinance passed in 1999; since then there hasn't been a single lawsuit filed.

As business people, as residents, as neighbors, as friends, we see the issues in this community, and we have come to understand how Proposition 4 would begin to correct, enhance, and advocate for this community in a way that the current structure of government is not capable. We see the economic, social, and environmental benefits, and **we will be voting Yes on Proposition 4**. We encourage you to do the same.

Felipe Gonzales, owner - Maya Earth Coffee

Ron Wells, owner - Wells & Company

Kim Harmson, owner - Kizuri

Charles Lightwalker, owner - The Family of Light Healing Centre

Ric Conner and Denise Attwood, owners - Ganesh Himal Trading

Sali Combelic, real estate agent

Danny Thiemens, owner – Working Class Heroes Bar & Grill