

I-97 Divest From War Volunteer Packet

Welcome to the I-97 Divest From War Initiative Campaign! Thank you for playing a crucial role in this precedent setting campaign.

When we make the November ballot with your help, antiwar and human rights activists around the country will see that we can do more than march in the streets and lobby elected representatives to end illegal wars and occupations in the Middle East.

You are taking part in very direct and meaningful action and we couldn't succeed without you.

Let's take the profit out of war!

Contents:

It's very important that you read all the material in this packet. This initiative is unique and relatively complicated, so it's important we are knowledgeable and factual when speaking with voters.

- Script / Recommended Signature
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Script:

Please use this script as a general guideline. You don't have to use it word for word, but it's important to stick to the facts and use as few words as possible to get the necessary information to voters.

"Are you a Seattle voter (remember, this is a city wide initiative, not county or state)?"

- If yes, continue, if no, simply say OK, thank you

"Will you sign this divest from war initiative?"

- Most people will say, "What is that?" or "What does that mean?"

"It would prohibit the city from investing its employee's retirement funds in companies that are war profiteering in the Middle East, like Halliburton in Iraq and Caterpillar in the Occupied Territories in Palestine."

- If they hesitate or seem to be curious for more info...

"With this initiative, we are following the dollar signs behind the illegal actions that are going on with our tax dollars in the Middle East."

And/Or

"With this initiative, we are going a step beyond marching in the streets and writing letters to our representatives because they are obviously not listening."

* If people want more detailed, technical information, please refer to the talking points in this packet.

* We are playing a game of percentages and time. We are *not* out there to educate people or get into debates or arguments. We are out there to get this thing on the ballot.

* It is important to keep it short and sweet and use words and phrases that will resonate with a typical Seattle resident who is against our government's role in the Middle East.

Recommended signature gathering locations:

- Anywhere where there are masses of people that live in the city!!!
- Grocery stores: Weekend daytime or weekday evenings
- Farmers markets: please refer to our online calendar for a list of farmers markets and find one in your neighborhood
- Big events: Again, please refer to the online calendar

Talking Points and Answers to Basic Questions

Seattle Divest from War & Occupation

<http://www.divestfromwar.org>

Purpose of the Initiative: To add some guidelines that fund managers have to follow when investing the Seattle Retirement Funds. Specifically, they will be prohibited from investing in companies that are directly involved in the various wars and occupations in the Middle East that have not been authorized by the UN, for example:

- Any company that has a direct on-the-ground presence in Iraq, whether it is military contractors or companies buying up privatized Iraqi state assets.
- Any company with a direct presence in Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories.
- Specifically targeting Halliburton because of their presence in Iraq, and Caterpillar because they sell the armored bulldozers that the Israeli army uses to destroy Palestinian homes, which is collective punishment and a war crime under the Geneva Conventions.
- Israeli government bonds, in the case of an Israeli military attack on Iran.

Not only moral, but financially sound in the long term. As the large class action settlement between the tobacco companies and various state attorney generals showed, just because an illegal activity is tolerated today, doesn't mean that it won't become a financial liability in the long term.

An ounce of prevention: This last point is important because here we are also trying to prevent the next war (with Iran), and not just remove the city from the last few ones.

What is the City required to do? Specifically, the city will have to share the guidelines for not divesting in war profiteers with the fund managers who invest the city's retirement funds. The fund managers are well aware of the activities of the companies that they invest in. (If not, they're not doing their jobs right.) So they will need to make sure that the companies that they invest our city's funds in are not directly involved in the various illegal wars and occupations in the Middle East.

Endorsements: This campaign has been endorsed by a number of prominent politicians, including Tim Hill, former Republican King County Executive, former congresswoman Cynthia McKinney and Amy Hagopian and Sally Soriano, who were both on the Seattle School Board. It's also endorsed by antiwar groups and individuals like West Seattle Neighbors for Peace and Justice, Chanan Suarezdiaz who is president of the Seattle chapter of Iraq Veterans Against the War, Cindy Sheehan, Jewish Voices for Peace, ANSWER Coalition, SNOW, Palestine Solidarity Committee and the Green Party of Washington State and Seattle.

Effect on Boeing: There should be none, unless if Boeing decides to buy up Halliburton or Blackwater, or open a manufacturing plant on the West Bank. This initiative does not target companies that produce or sell weapons. Even though many of us find that activity distasteful, it is not illegal under our current laws, and so you can't argue that those companies are a bad investment because of the risk of future lawsuits.

Precedent-setting: We don't think anything like this has been tried anywhere in the country. If this takes off, it can affect the bottom lines of the companies profiting from these wars.

Need Volunteers: We need to collect almost 18,000 signatures in six months. This is a grassroots effort. We don't have Tim Eyman's deep pockets to pay for signatures. We're counting on people who want to do something concrete to help end these wars and occupations, to help us get this initiative on the ballot. Please take a few sheets and a stamped envelope and even if you get your closest friends and family to sign, it will be a big help to us.

Or visit us at <http://www.divestfromwar.org>

Is the City Invested in these funds? The city gives chunks of money to different fund managers and asks each one to make it multiply. They use the money to buy and sell stocks and bonds. So the city could be invested in one of these companies today but not tomorrow. What this initiative does is create some rules and guidelines around investment in war profiteering companies.

It is just as likely that an attack on Iran will come from the US as from Israel. Why is the ballot initiative calling only for divestment from Israeli government bonds in case of an attack on Iran?

The short answer is that you cannot divest from yourself! There are legal issues that could affect a divestment campaign targeting US government bonds, and we did not have the resources to address that.

Also, the threat of a divestment campaign against Israeli government bonds is actually likely to influence their behavior, whereas a divestment campaign against US government bonds is much less likely to influence the behavior of the US government.

Finally, we want this ballot language to actually be adopted by Seattle voters, and it is a lot less likely to be adopted if it called for divestment from US government bonds.

What about Afghanistan? We are calling for divestment from illegal wars. Technically, the war in Afghanistan was authorized by the UN. Many people might feel like that's not justification enough. But we can't make the same legal argument.

Can tax-exempt organizations support this? YES! The IRS has very clear guidelines that say that nonprofit organizations cannot work on candidate elections, but they are allowed to work on issues, and on ballot initiatives, as long as the ballot initiative is not the main thing that the nonprofit works on. There is more information on the campaign's web site (under Materials->Frequently Asked Questions), including a link to a press release from the IRS web site.

What do the city workers think of this? The individual workers that we have come across have almost all been very supportive. We have also contacted Local 17 of the International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers, which is the largest union representing city of Seattle workers. In an email on June 27, one of their Seattle representatives said that Local 17 will not be weighing in on this issue, because they have members on both sides of this question. In any case, state law is very clear on this issue. RCW section 35.39.032 says that the ultimate decision-making body for a city pension fund is the city's legislative authority (which is the Seattle City Council, or the voters, via the initiative process). I-97 is a petition to the city council, and will go to the voters only if the council doesn't act on it.

I-97 Myths and Realities

Myth: I-97 is not legal and will be thrown out in court.

Reality: While some opponents have tried to tie us down with a frivolous lawsuit, state law is actually very clear on this issue. RCW 35.39.032 states:

No investment shall be made without the approval of the legislative authority of the city or town expressed by ordinance: PROVIDED, That except as otherwise provided by law, the legislative authority may by ordinance authorize a city official or a committee composed of several city officials to determine the amount of money available in each fund for investment purposes and make the investments authorized ...

In other words, the Seattle City Council has ultimate investment authority. Even if they have delegated some of that authority to the Retirement Board, ultimate authority rests with them.

And we all know that state law also allows voters to (1) petition their city council through the ballot initiative process and (2) override the city council at the ballot box if the city council does not act on a petition that has collected the sufficient number of signatures.

Therefore, I-97 is fully legal and will stand up to bogus court challenges.

Myth: The initial title of I-97 was changed because it was deceptive.

Reality: This title was written by the City Attorney's office, not by the campaign. Opponents sued to have it changed to something that was, indeed deceptive. The judge threw out the language proposed by the plaintiffs, but took the opportunity to substitute his own language. He also ruled that the signatures gathered to that point (under the old title) are valid and can be counted, essentially refuting the argument that the ballot title was deceptive.

Myth: I-97 singles out Israel.

Reality: The initiative says nothing about companies invested in Israel, or even companies that sell general-purpose weapons to the Israeli military. It only talks about companies involved directly in the Occupied Territories. Basically, I-97 applies the same anti-occupation rule to all illegal occupations in the Middle East. The fact that to some people this looks like singling out of Israel only shows that they expect a double standard when it comes to the treatment of Israel.

Do's and Don'ts:

DO:

- * Verify that you can read the person's name. The number 1 reason signatures are invalidated is because they can't read the name! And if you can't read it, chances are that the County Clerk can't either. If you have doubts, you can try to guess it and ask them politely if it is correct. People are very nice and understanding about this issue.
- * Verify that they put down the address and the date.
- * Point out the campaign web site if they say they need to read more about the issue.
- * Respect others who are collecting signatures, selling newspapers, etc.

DON'T:

- * Don't get into political discussions with people who are obviously not going to sign the petition. This should become obvious within 30 seconds of engaging them.
- * Don't be rude to the opposition. If someone is not willing to sign the initiative, thank them, explain that you are here to collect signatures, and move on to the next person.
- * Don't get into arguments with authorities (store managers, farmers market staff, cops, etc.)
- * If you are on public property, don't let anyone try to argue with you that you can't be there. You have the right to be there as long as you are not disrupting traffic.
- * Don't assume, based on someone's appearance, that they won't sign. Ask everyone, and you'll be surprised!