



February 9, 2017

Mr. Peter Ward
President
New York Hotel and Motels Trades Council
305 West 44th Street
New York, NY 10036

Dear Mr. Ward:

Our organization, Checks and Balances Project, is a nonpartisan public watchdog blog that focuses on bringing greater accountability to government officials, corporate managers and others who block progress in building a more sustainable economy. For the past few months, we have been following the political and business activities of the New York Hotel and Motel Trades Council (HTC), Local 6 and UNITE HERE with great interest. While your organizations have a long and venerable history in forming landmark policies that will shape the future of New York City, we have serious concerns and questions about political contributions made by your unions.

The most recent example was the revelation on Feb. 4 in the *New York Daily News* that UNITE HERE – a union in which you hold the salaried officer position of Recording Secretary – contributed \$200,000 to the Campaign for One New York. In response to questions from the *Daily News*, your spokesman claimed you were “not aware this contribution had been made until [you] read about it in the Daily News.”

As you know, UNITE HERE's constitution lists your position of Recording Secretary as one of the members of its Executive Committee, "the highest governing body of UNITE HERE." One of your core functions is to keep minutes recording all major decisions. It stands to reason that you were, in fact, aware of the decision – and indeed one of the people who made the decision – when UNITE HERE elected to contribute a major sum to the mayor of your own city. After all, this \$200,000 contribution was by far the largest made by UNITE HERE to any nonprofit in New York in 2015.

If your spokesperson is correct, and you were not aware of the contribution, it raises serious questions about your effectiveness in your position – one for which you are handsomely compensated. Our research indicates that as the Recording Secretary of UNITE HERE and Business Manager of its Local 6, you have received years of six-figure paychecks. By our estimate, these salaries combined with your HTC salary totaled \$439,656 in 2015 alone (the most recent data available). The average New York hotel worker – whose union dues fund your salary – made \$45,688.

Your spokesperson's claim that you had no knowledge of the \$200,000 contribution is all the more puzzling given that UNITE HERE and HTC, as well as the advocacy group Share Better, have many of the same lobbyists and consultants. These include Metropolitan Public Strategies (MPS) – which was founded by former HTC and UNITE HERE officers with whom you have served – and Pitta Bishop Del Giorno & Giblin (Pitta Bishop), which is operated by your brother-

Mr. Peter Ward
February 9, 2017
Page Two

in-law. According to public records, Pitta Bishop employs and has specifically assigned your daughter, nephew and brother-in-law to lobby on HTC, UNITE HERE and Local 6's behalf.

This is just the latest in a series of questionable political contributions made by the unions you lead. Last October, [we sent you a letter](#) that inquired about a \$100,000 to the Hotel Association of New York City (HANY). We never received a response, even after a follow up call, but our questions still stand:

- Were you aware of this contribution?
- Were your members aware that their dues were being sent to an organization that has fought against the raising the minimum wage, labor protections and other issues that are important to your union and its members?
- Was UNITE HERE – again, an organization you lead and from which you draw a large paycheck – aware that HTC was contributing money to HANY?

The \$100,000 payment to HANY occurred at around the same time as your \$200,000 contribution to the Campaign for One New York.

Thank you in advance for taking the time to address these questions and the issues raised in this letter so we can share your answers with our readers.

Regards,



Scott Peterson
Executive Director
Checks and Balances Project

Cc: New York State Joint Commission on Public Ethics
Scott S. Dahl, Inspector General, U.S. Department of Labor
Cheryl Garcia, Office of Labor Racketeering and Fraud Investigations, U.S. Dept. of Labor
Michael C. Mikulka, New York Regional Office, U.S. Department of Labor