



Mayor Pro Tem Dave Martin

Oppose HB 2087 by Perez relating to mandatory arbitration for Houston Firefighters.

As the Mayor Pro Tem of the City of Houston, I work closely with Mayor Turner in dealing with City Council and our city departments. My professional experience is serving as the managing director of Marsh & McLennan Companies, Inc. and working at the accounting firms PricewaterhouseCoopers, LLP and Ernst & Young, LLP. Likely, that's why the Mayor appointed me Chair of our Budget and Fiscal Affairs Committee, charged with all fiscal matters and initiatives to improve management and efficiency of City service delivery.

In November 2017, the City of Houston, together with financial advisory firm PFM, LLC, released a report entitled Ten Year Financial Plan for the City of Houston. The plan confronts Houston's significant fiscal challenges and sets forth multiple recommendations. To date, the city has implemented five recommendations with an additional seven in the works.

Key part about this: our elected leaders are making these decisions, not someone who is unelected and unaccountable to voters. Let me tell you, in a revenue capped city with the strictest property tax cap in the State of Texas, financial decisions, and the impact on services, are something that Houstonians should decide.

Since serving on City Council, I've voted to approve multiple contracts with police and municipal employees. Both of the unions for police & municipal have "Meet & Confer" statutes in state law.

Our Firefighter union, on the other hand, has Collective Bargaining. The purpose of collective bargaining is to encourage voluntary agreements between employer and employee, but under Mayor Parker and now under Mayor Turner, we've been unable to come to a new contract with the Fire Union. This, despite offers for the city of a 13% raise in the last bargaining session.

It should go without saying, but yes, I and Mayor Turner agree that firefighters deserve a pay raise. Period. But it has to be a pay raise that taxpayers can afford. The Mayor does indeed still have his abacus in his office as an example of the city's financial constraints. Again, he offered a 13% pay raise, and it was turned down.

For additional information, please contact Bill Kelly at 832.524.3790 or Jamaal Smith at 713.494.2462.

I do not understand why changing to “Meet & Compel” in state law becomes an answer to a union who hasn’t been able to say yes to a contract.

Municipal employs have a contract.

Houston Police have a contract.

What does granting this new bargaining status to a group unable to get to “yes” say to those health department workers and those solid waste crews working throughout the pandemic, not to mention our police officers working throughout the community.

Recently, the City of San Antonio found itself in a similar situation, but where voters approved a binding arbitration for their Fire Fighters. I’ll note that election was voted on by San Antonio taxpayers regarding the level of fire service provided to the people of San Antonio. The union there didn’t try to come to Austin to get a deal that the people of their hometown would never give them.

“Meet & Compel” is an even higher standard than collective bargaining, encouraging parties to maintain impasse positions during negotiations. It does not incentivize reaching voluntary agreement during those negotiations.

The members of City Council and the Mayor of Houston, elected by the people of Houston, deserve to make the decisions for Houston city government, not unelected arbitrators mandated by the State Legislature. That’s true for San Antonio, and it’s true for Rockwall, true in East Texas and it’s true for Houston.

I can appreciate the perspective of wanting to get a new contract and pay raise for Houston Fire Fighters. But taking away the power of local officials to make decisions is not the right way to go about it.

Please oppose HB 2087 and allow officials elected by the citizens, rather than unelected arbitrators, to manage the city’s finances.

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