

Dear Chamber Member:

When you cast your vote on the November 6th ballot, I encourage you to vote against collective bargaining for our city's firefighters. And here are the reasons why.

- As a former city manager (1985-89), I can tell you that the City of Fort Worth has one of the best retirement systems in the state, if not the nation. When employees retire, they receive a pension plus health care insurance for life at no cost to them. Current and retired employees will continue to get those benefits when they retire. Over the years we have enjoyed an amicable negotiation process—there's no need to jeopardize this situation with a union-based process that takes a key budget decision out of the hands of local elected and administrative officials.
- Just like the private sector, some time in the future, the City Council may have to consider modifying retirement benefits for new employees based upon the escalating health care insurance costs. I am confident that the Fort Worth City Council members will be fair with all employees while balancing providing the best employee benefits with quality city services and reasonable tax rates.
- Several Texas cities have collective bargaining and according to my former peers who prepare city budgets, collective bargaining has added a time-consuming and expensive step to the budgeting process. Add to that, the gap in salaries and benefits between the public safety employees and other city employees has already grown dramatically, and collective bargaining will only make this gap a more troublesome problem and a greater tax obligation on local taxpayers.

- As an example of the problem that can be created, Beaumont, Texas has been tied up in collective bargaining negotiations with the firefighters union since June 2005 over a three-year contract, having first gone to arbitration and now the courts. Their city council no longer has control of the city budget; outsiders do.

And that is why I encourage Fort Worth voters to vote against collective bargaining for the firefighters on November 6th.

Doug Harman, former Fort Worth City Manager