

## Archives

THIS STORY HAS BEEN FORMATTED FOR EASY PRINTING

---

**About your archives purchase:** Your purchase of **10** articles expires on **07/02/2011 2:12 PM**. You have viewed **9** articles and have **1** articles remaining.

The article you requested is displayed below.

### **Fire union criticizes city memo The leader of the City Council staff defends the document on a proposed contract.**

**Author(s):** Joseph Morton WORLD - HERALD STAFF WRITER  
**Date:** August 27, 2003 **Section:** News

An Omaha City Council staffer should admit he distributed false information about the proposed firefighter contract or he should resign, **Fire Union President Mike McDonnell** said Wednesday. **McDonnell** said he is "frustrated" about a seven - page memo prepared by council staff member Warren Weaver that characterized a proposed **fire** contract as expensive to the city.

"This document was put together to mislead the public, the City Council and the media," **McDonnell** said. "We are giving Warren Weaver and Lou Andersen to the end of the business day to retract this document and put out the correct information."

He said Weaver should retract the document and put out the correct information - or resign. (6, 08/28/03)

Otherwise, he said, the union will seek Weaver's ouster.

Andersen, who leads the council staff, said the report to the council is substantially correct, except for a few revisions.

The changes are "not as significant as the firefighter union portrays," Andersen said. No one will resign, he said.

A revised report, noting the changes and the disagreements, will be sent to the council, Andersen said. He said he doesn't feel compelled to act under the union's deadline.

The firefighter contract covers the next four years and is key to Mayor **Mike Fahey's** proposal for balancing the 2004 budget without a property tax increase or citywide layoffs. It includes a one - year pay

freeze that is paid back later.

Other city employees are questioning the size of the firefighters' compensation package, and the skepticism has reached members of the City Council.

The **fire** union and the city's largest civilian union are scheduled to vote next week on their proposed contracts. The civilian employees are being asked to take a wage freeze for a second year in a row.

The council is scheduled to vote Sept. 9 on those contracts and the budget as a whole.

Two civilian employees complained at a council hearing Tuesday that what they are receiving in exchange for another wage freeze pales in comparison to the proposed firefighter deal.

"The **fire** union's going to be handed the candy store," public works employee John Schwope told the council.

Councilman Dan Welch said he will vote against the proposed **fire** contract and will encourage other councilmen to do so as well. Welch wants to work out a way to balance the budget next year and then negotiate a completely **new** contract with the **fire** union that is more favorable to the city.

Omaha has to look at closing libraries, community centers and pools because the **Fire** Department already receives too much, Welch said.

"Right now we're in a budget crunch, and one of the reasons is the amount of money we're pouring into that department," Welch said. "While they're living high on the hog, other departments are suffering."

He said Fahey's proposal extends a bad contract through the end of 2007 and gives the firefighters additional benefits.

Fahey has said the proposed **fire** contract is a fair one to the city and its employees.

The Weaver memo highlights areas of the **new** contract that will cost the city money.

For example, longevity pay, which is based on a firefighter's seniority, will increase by as much as 500 percent for some firefighters, according to the memo.

City Finance Director Stan Timm said only about 15 percent of firefighters receive that much in specialty pay. (1, 08/28/03)

Administration officials said that memo distorts the truth.

Many of the costs outlined in the memo represent what the city has to give back to the **fire** union in exchange for the reductions in 2004, they said, and the total percentages of reductions and increases balance out.

"A dollar is a dollar," said Fahey **Chief** of Staff Paul Landow.

Other parts of the memo are simply wrong or misleading, Landow said.

For example, the memo asserts that more than one - third of firefighters are receiving more than \$400 a month in specialty pay.

Landow added that there are legitimate reasons for people to receive specialty pay.

"Specialty pay is used to encourage firefighters to advance their education and skills." \* Landow said. "The result is a much more professional and better - trained firefighting force." (1, 08/28/03)

"We're disappointed with (the memo), because it seriously distorts and misrepresents reality," Landow said. (1, 08/28/03)

**Mike McDonnell**, the **fire** union's president, Tuesday rejected criticism that the firefighters were getting a sweetheart deal. (1, 08/28/03)

Landow said the memo contains bad information.

Still, Welch said the **fire** union more than makes up down the road what members give up in 2004.

Welch said his first goal is to repeal the city's minimum staffing ordinance, which requires four firefighters per piece of equipment.

That would allow the city to get by with fewer firefighters and save money, Welch said.

**Technical problems:** If you have a technical problem with your account please e-mail [newslibrary@newsbank.com](mailto:newslibrary@newsbank.com).

Copyright (c) 2003 Omaha World Herald