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Police contract foes not swayed by grim outlook on pension fund Frustrated taxpayers angrily question city officials' dire projections as a public forum becomes a verbal boxing match. Wednesday night forum

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Not even more bad news about the city's **pension** fund could convince people Tuesday that the mayor's proposed **police** contract is in the best interest of **Omaha** taxpayers. The city's long-term projected shortfall in the **police** and fire **pension** fund grew by at least \$100 million as of the end of 2009, rising to \$620 million.

That was the message from Gregg Rueschhoff, the city's actuary, at a forum on the proposed deal at the **Omaha** Public Schools' headquarters, 3215 Cuming St.

Earlier projections had placed the **pension** gap between \$500 million and \$520 million. City officials have said that if the problem is not addressed, the **pension** fund could eventually bankrupt the city.

But the gloomier City of **Omaha** finances failed to persuade the 30 people who attended the forum to get behind the **police** contract.

The evening turned into a verbal boxing match during a question-and-answer session - the city in one corner, frustrated taxpayers in the other.

Human Resources Director Richard O'Gara might as well have been wearing a black-and-white striped shirt and blown a whistle, for he was clearly the referee.

"Calm down," O'Gara repeated during a tense moment. "I said I wouldn't shout at you if you don't shout at me."

Some residents angrily questioned the accuracy of the city's projections. Others said they didn't want to pay for the **pension** fund problems.

Mayor Jim Suttle's 2011 budget proposes a new tax on restaurant meals that he says will make up the city's contribution into the **police** and fire **pension**. **Police** also are being asked to contribute more of their paychecks into the fund, although some City Council members have said it's not enough.

Suttle's budget also would raise the property tax rate and the wheel tax.

"When I pick up the phone and I call 911, I want that officer there," said **Omaha** resident Ernie Boykin. "But if you want to know why taxpayers are looking at you cross-eyed, it's because when they roll up to the gas pump, increase ... property tax, increase. Wheel tax, increase. Eating out, increase. Groceries, increase.

"Sooner or later the taxpayer isn't going to have anything else left in their pocketbook or billfold to pay the benefits you enjoy," Boykin told Officer Aaron Hanson, president of the **Omaha police** union.

Hanson said **police** officers, who are also taxpayers, were frustrated too, because their **pensions** would be lower under Suttle's contract, they'd have to put more money into the **pension** fund and they agreed to wage freezes for 2009 and 2010.

"There's been a lot of tough choices and sacrifices made by everybody," Hanson said.

Suttle did not attend the meeting. He was involved in several National Night Out events Tuesday night in **Omaha**.

He has said that his agreement with **police** ends **pension** spiking, instead basing new officers' **pensions** on their regular pay only, and raises the retirement age.

The council could vote on the contract as soon as Aug. 17. A public hearing will be Aug. 10.

Also Tuesday, council members met with city **department** heads to learn more about the budget plan. The council is scheduled to vote on the budget Aug. 24.

WEDNESDAY NIGHT FORUM

The City of **Omaha** will host a second public forum to discuss the proposed **police** contract Wednesday at Westside High School, 8701

Pacific St.

As at Tuesday's meeting, Human Resources Director Richard O'Gara will lead a presentation on the agreement, and the public will have an opportunity to ask questions.

The forum starts at 6:30 p.m. and ends at 8 p.m.

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