

UNIFORMED PROFESSIONAL FIRE FIGHTERS ASSOCIATION OF CONNECTICUT

AFFILIATED WITH INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS

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Good afternoon, Honorable Chairmen Rep. Berger and Sen. Fonfara, members of the Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee, my name is Richard Hart. I represent the Uniformed Professional Firefighters Association of Connecticut which represents 57 Local affiliates of the International Association of Firefighters. Membership in the UPFFA is comprised of approximately 4,000 Union firefighters in Connecticut.

Flashback to Waterbury;
General Fund: \$70.7 million deficit

Pension Fund: \$431.3 million deficit, 4.4 percent funded

General Liability Fund: \$2.5 million deficit, 54 percent funded

Worker Compensation Fund: \$6.5 million deficit, 46 percent funded

Heart and Hypertension Fund: \$5.2 million deficit, 46 percent funded

Bond Rating: Fitch BB junk, Moody's Baa3, Standard & Poor's BBB-minus

This was Waterbury's financial status in 2001 prior to Special Act 01-1. As a result of the City refusing to conduct reevaluation since 1979, fiscal malfeasance, and the raiding the pension fund to balance budgets; all in the interest of political expediency, the City was a financial disaster. The State authorized up to \$75 million in state-guaranteed, 20-year bonds and up to \$50 million in short-term interim bonds to bail the City out. Having endured the Waterbury State Oversight Board's (SOB) actions since 2001, their ruthlessness and total disregard for employee rights likens their actions to Robespierre during the French Reign of Terror in 1793. According to OLR report 2005-R-0486, SA01-1's labor provisions superseded the Municipal Employee Relations Act (MERA) and the Teacher Negotiation Act (TNA) on future contracts, not contracts in force at the date of passage. SA 01-1 also gives the board the authority to request reopening existing contracts,

but not the unilateral authority to do so. Waterbury was 30 days from not making payroll and the pension fund was raided to the point it was “pay as you go”.

The SOB took to the Firefighter’s contract like a dog to a bone. They ripped it apart, imposing their will and ideals as to “how a contract should read” with unflagging enthusiasm. A 25% increase in work with a corresponding 25% reduction in pay was one “prize” the SOB awarded the Firefighters. Upon imposing the work schedule change, Jim Mullen, a financial “expert” appointed to the Board told the Firefighter’s Union in regards to the 56 hour work week, “try it, you might like it”. It was this condescending and arrogant attitude that the members of the SOB exhibited that overshadowed any positive change they enacted.

SA 01-1 gave the SOB Paul Bunyan’s axe, and they used it with zeal and without prejudice.

SB 464 has taken SA 01-1, pumped it full of steroids and released it into the open. What lessons that were learned and mistakes made in SA 01-1 in Waterbury, has been the curriculum in Mayor Bronin’s tutelage in his first 75 days in office. Mayor Bronin, in 75 days in office, has thrown his hands up, surrendered, and ran to this Legislature for help. According to SB 464, there is not any request for deficit bonding, or any other financial assistance from the State. This does not speak well to Mayor Bronin’s leadership in Hartford. SB 464 is even more egregious than SA 01-1, in that the powers, if this legislation passes as written, would allow the City to open current Union contracts and “to require the city” to renegotiate retiree pension, health, and welfare benefits. This flies in the face of the intent and purpose of collective bargaining and binding arbitration. History is destined to repeat itself if this legislation passes.

Return the Paul’s axe to the wood shed, never to be seen again.

Thank you,

Richard Hart



DIRECTOR

Legislative/Political Affair

