

## A Vision for Boston: Questions for the 2009 At-Large City Council Candidates

### EMPLOYEE SPENDING

*As a candidate for City Council what do you think is the best way to control the growth in employee compensation and ensure a sustainable workforce? How will you manage spending for employees, particularly health insurance and pension costs? What steps will you take to restructure and re-prioritize city services? How will you determine the optimal, sustainable level of city and school employees?*



#### **Felix Arroyo**

One of the leading contributions of the Boston Municipal Research Bureau is your diligence in quantifying and highlighting the unsustainable growth in the City's labor costs. Given the national recession, now and in 2010 are ideal times to address this growth aggressively. As a City Councilor, I am legally forbidden from interfering directly in negotiations with labor unions representing city workers. And I am also a firm believer in the right to organize and collectively bargain. Nevertheless, as part of my responsibility to pass a balanced budget, it is necessary for all City Councilors to support necessary emergency measures like the one-year wage freezes recently negotiated by the Mayor and to pursue every available option for curtailing our personnel spending. I will support efforts to reduce overtime spending in public safety departments and to trim the workforce through hiring freezes, early retirement offers and otherwise. I also fully support exploring all options to reduce health care costs that can be negotiated with city employees.

#### **John Connolly**

A difficult, but necessary task for municipalities is negotiating an employee compensation system that attracts and retains highly-qualified workers, while protecting the interests of taxpayers. All municipalities are struggling today with the challenge of addressing rising health insurance and pension costs, and I remain committed to working to address these challenges. Recognizing that Boston's success is tied to the efficiency of its public workforce, we need to be open to innovative, cost-effective options that will allow us to deliver the highest quality municipal services, while providing our City workers good wages and health care.

In the past two budget cycles, I have made it a priority to look for savings through better energy efficiency in our City facilities and vehicle fleet and I have pushed for better utilization and integration of technology in delivering City services. I recognize that these two proposals alone will not solve our fiscal problems. We must prioritize paying a greater share of our OPEB obligations in future City budgets and we must work with our City Unions to explore ways to ensure good wages and good health care while simultaneously reducing our long term expenses and obligations.

#### **Tomas Gonzalez**

The City is in the midst of a fiscal crisis and is staffed beyond a sustainable capacity. I am advocating for a real hiring freeze. The city's staffing levels should be determined from year to year based on programmatic successes, demographic changes and projected needs. We can no longer afford to be locked into antiquated systems that consume large shares of the budget. For example, the city can no longer afford to provide health care to its retirees as part of their

pension plan. My ideas regarding our health care challenges are outlined in my response to the Brief on Health Insurance and OPEB. I also believe that taking measures to become a more transparent and accountable City, for example through the use of CitiStat, will help us control costs. Residents deserve immediate access to information and to accurate and reliable answers to their basic questions. By automating this process it will eliminate the need for positions dedicated solely to responding to calls. Additionally, I would advocate for the elimination of "red circled" jobs. These jobs should end when the individual retires. Jobs should be determined by the present performance of an employee.

## **Tito Jackson**

Making sure that Boston residents have great jobs is my top priority, and this priority certainly extends to the people who teach our children, ensure that our neighborhoods are safe, and provide other critical city services. Residents of the City of Boston, who ultimately pay the salaries of city employees, rightly want to know that their taxes are being used to provide these basic services as efficiently as possible. The collective bargaining process has not only played the leading role in shaping our shared understanding of what a great job is, but also will continue to be the best framework in which to find the right balance of employment terms for city employees going forward.

The current practice of changing the size of the city-employed workforce in response to frequent changes in city revenues and state and federal aid is costly and leads to employment instability. As an At-Large City Councilor, I would insist that the goal of long-term stability of employment levels would be a guiding objective of any negotiations within the collective bargaining framework. Given this long-term commitment, a transparent negotiations process will help identify opportunities to spend more effectively on health care and pension costs.

## **Andrew Kenneally**

I believe we have to do two things:

- First we need to use CitiStat, which is a government management program that will allow the city to better manage its services and its resources. Currently the city has no way of knowing how many people are using city services. CitiStat will better allow to be as efficient as possible with City resources by tracking what people are asking for and how quickly we are answering those requests.
- Second, we need to encourage more unions to join the state-run Group Insurance Commission (GIC). By joining the state's GIC, the city and the state could negotiate more competitive rates with the larger membership pool.

## **Ayanna Pressley**

Recent studies show that on the current track, Boston could face financial disaster because of health and pension costs. We are a better city because of the work that labor does to protect workers short- and long-term interests, but we must balance the protection of workers benefits with the possibility of someday having to cut jobs. If these studies are on target, we need to start engaging in these conversations *now*. We should protect older workers who bargained in good faith, and made a long-standing commitment to our city. But we must also start thinking about the younger workers now, and making sure that those benefits will even exist 20 years from now.

This must happen at the collective bargaining table, with all relevant information out in the open, and reaching a hand across that table to create a shared responsibility for our long-term future.

As for the optimal and sustainable level of employees, those can only be determined by what suffers as a result. Do we want 40 children in a classroom because 25 isn't sustainable? As a councilor, I will seek to engage all stakeholders, including municipal unions, in a strategic discussion of what budget can be sustained.