



November 6, 2016

Dear Fellow East Siders:

As we conclude the longest journey to Election Day I can remember, this week's letter discusses Tuesday's ballot questions and the fire fighters' contract.

Some of you have asked my own choices for Tuesday's ballot questions. I plan to vote in favor of all seven State questions, which are summarized in the Secretary of State's [Voter Information Handbook](#). Two State bond questions have particular significance in Providence, namely Question 5, which would fund expansions at the Port of Providence, and Question 7, which would expand affordable housing. While the General Assembly's vetting of the port project was hurried, the fundamental argument supporting the bond looks to the expansion of the Panama Canal. Other, larger American ports are adapting to larger ships. This will leave smaller ships in search of new ports, which could be a boon for Providence. Saturday's Providence Journal contains an [article](#) explaining how the State determines how much money it can afford to borrow. On that note, the Fitch rating agency increased the City's bond rating last week, further confirming the City's ability to borrow \$40 million to repair needed infrastructure. Because they could not gain discretionary control for individual members over spending, the City Council membership withheld approval for the bond, creating a "zombie bond" that cannot be funded even if Providence voters approve Question 8. At Thursday's City Council meeting, the majority passed a resolution (which I and some others opposed) stating that the City could not afford the bond, even though these same Council members would happily have called the bond affordable had it included discretionary accounts. I will continue to work on persuading my colleagues that the City's serious needs are more important than their political agenda of individual control.

Last Tuesday night, the Finance Committee held its first hearing on the fire fighters' tentative agreement. I submitted a [Letter](#) to the Finance Chair noting two areas in which the agreement can be improved. First, a consultant (named MMA) concluded that the City should eliminate at least two ladder companies, while the tentative agreement eliminates only one. When the consultant was hired, the fire fighters' union supported the choice and gave their full cooperation. The timing is excellent, as the City is currently significantly understaffed. As a result, eliminating a second ladder company would not affect the employment of a single current union member, or even any of the 80 people expected to be hired in the next year. This change alone could save \$1.5 million per year, or \$7.5 million over the life of a 5-year contract. The second proposal is to build flexibility into the contract so that the City can pursue new programs to identify the people with non-urgent needs who are currently transported in ambulances. All of us are familiar with these stories on an anecdotal basis, and other cities (such as Fort Worth and Louisville) have developed "nurse triage" programs that provide appropriate transportation and treatment service for non-urgent patients. This can increase the job satisfaction of the City's emergency medical technicians, while reducing costs for the City.

Sincerely,