



September 30, 2018

Dear Fellow East Siders:

We are now in full campaign season for the decisions we will make in November for, among other positions, the United States Senate, the Governor and the Mayor. In the meantime, the City's work continues. This week's letter will discuss the school bus driver strike, the teacher union's modification of its "work to rule" program and a request for your suggestions of neighborhood organizations and projects worthy of modest financial support.

The school bus vendor (First Student) stopped providing bus service on Thursday due to a strike by its bus drivers. Earlier last week, the School Department Oversight Committee reviewed what contractual rights the Providence Public Schools had in light of the termination of service by its contractor. We learned that the contract contains a "force majeure" clause that exempts the vendor from responsibility to the Providence Public Schools for a list of conditions, the bulk of which describe catastrophic events beyond First Student's control. We were surprised, however, to learn that the list also includes the possibility of a strike, which in my opinion is an event within First Student's control. According to a [Report](#) by WPRI-TV, the School Department solicited bids that place this responsibility on the vendor's tab; however, First Student negotiated a change to relieve its responsibility. While I do not know the details of the negotiations, I suspect that First Student had extensive leverage due to the absence of other competitive and/or qualifying bids. When I was on the School Board in 2000-02, other vendors were reluctant to bid for Providence because we required them to garage their buses (and pay property tax) in Providence. While this requirement may be beneficial for the City's tax revenues, the School Department Oversight Committee will ask the administration to develop other alternatives that would allow more bidders and the benefits of competition in awarding the next contract. The School Department Oversight Committee will be meeting on Monday, October 1 at 6:00 to receive an update concerning the impacts of this unfortunate strike.

Also at last week's meeting, the School Department Oversight Committee received a brief update from the Superintendent concerning contract negotiations with the Providence Teachers Union and the status of their decision to "work to rule," under which teachers would refrain from performing any work beyond the specific requirements of the contract. On this basis, teachers had declined to write college reference letters for high school students, but the Superintendent reported last week that teachers have reconsidered this particular measure, and are now writing college recommendation letters. I believe this was a wise move by the teachers, because most parents with whom I spoke were blaming the teachers union, not the administration, for this action. Some parents asked whether it would make sense to negotiate this and other types of "optional" teacher work into the next contract. I shared my view that the contract (which currently is around 70 pages in length) should be shorter, rather than longer, and that it would be a mistake to view the contract as the maximum amount of work that teachers will perform, as well as the minimum. Instead, most teachers in my experience are highly skilled professionals who are truly committed to the success of their students, and their individual initiatives should be encouraged and appreciated.

As a result of my decision not to seek re-election, I plan to close out my campaign account by the end of this year. This has allowed me to show my appreciation for the classroom teachers at four of our neighborhood schools (King, Gregorian, Bishop and Classical) by working with their PTO's (King, Gregorian and Bishop) and Alumni Association (Classical) to purchase and distribute \$50 Staples gift cards for each teacher to pay for classroom supplies that they often have to fund out of their own pockets. (I also am working with the School Department to identify a conduit to make a similar contribution to Hope High School's teachers, as campaign finance laws do not permit me to contribute the funds directly to the school.) While this effort will require the majority of the funds in my account, I still will have a remaining balance that I can contribute to charitable organizations. I welcome your suggestions for modest gifts, particularly for groups or organizations that operate in our neighborhood and/or benefit our neighbors. Please feel free to send me an email with your suggestions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Samuel D. Zurier'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'S' at the beginning.