



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS

GRASSROOTS POLITICS AND IAFF MOBILIZATION

March 30, 2026

OBJECTIVES

- Understand where political decisions are actually made at the local, state, and federal levels, and how locals fit into that system.
- Participants will leave able to design and operate a basic local advocacy program.
- Learn prioritizing issues, assigning ownership, activating members strategically, and engaging elected officials professionally.



POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT DEFINED

- Advocacy/engagement is **mandatory**.
- Advocacy/engagement is **intentional** – in cadence *and* focus.
- Advocacy/engagement happens at **home**.



WHY POLITICS?

- For most IAFF members, **being involved in politics was not the job** you signed up for.
- **Every decision** made about our work lives is made by **someone who was elected** to office or appointed by someone elected.

Politics is a tool that we can and must use to improve the lives of our members.



IAFF MISSION

- The IAFF's legislative and political mission is straightforward:

Improve the lives, safety, and working conditions of fire fighters and the communities we serve.



CONSEQUENCES OF NON-ENGAGEMENT

Disengaged

Someone else fills the vacuum.

No Input

Decisions still get made, but they are made without input.

Cumulative

The long-term cost is cumulative. What is lost today, becomes normalized tomorrow



TIMING MATTERS MORE THAN VOLUME.

ENGAGEMENT

VERSUS

REACTION

- Set the agenda
- Shape conversations
- Frame issues

- Shows up late
- Fights on defense
- Does not advance issues



BUILDING YOUR TEAM

ART OF THE PIT CREW

- Specialization is key
- Be intentional about roles
- Some skills are teachable, some are inherent – and that's okay!
- Some people can fill multiple roles



POLICY EXPERT

- Analyze legislation
- Good at researching information
- Track hearings, legislation, etc.



WRITER

- Written documents are critical
 - One-pagers
 - Memos
 - Press releases
 - Social media copy



COMMUNICATOR

- Brings people together
 - Schedule and/or facilitate meetings
 - Cold call – possible allies, donors, etc
 - Work a crowd at community events
- Find the “golden retriever”



QUARTERBACK

- Brings the team together
- Sets the vision
- Identify the short-term and long-term opportunities
- Often the Local President – sometimes a committee chair



VALUE OF COALITIONS

Advocates Outside of Your Local to Help You

Other impacted organizations
Concerned citizens

Why a coalition?

- Goals are similar and compatible
- Working together will enhance both groups' reach
- Can be temporary – friendships aren't marriages
- Beware of disadvantages



COALITION BUILDING AND GRASSROOTS MOBILIZATION

1. Fire Service or Public Safety

- IAFF and Fire Chiefs (AFG, Cancer Presumption, tax levies)
- Partner with Police or other public employees on bargaining rights, pensions.

2. Labor and Worker Rights

- State Labor groups or Retirement Security

3. Community-Based

- Community Health and Safety pushing for EMS funding or Community Paramedicine

4. Political and Legislative

- Bipartisan Fire Caucus



GRASSROOTS MOBILIZATION

1. Member-Driven Advocacy Campaigns
 - Legislative drop-ins and Letter writing campaigns
2. Digital and Social Mobilization
 - Targeted Email and texts to members. Social media amplification.
3. Community Mobilization
 - Elected ride along, Public education events of union priorities
4. Election-Cycle Mobilization
 - Candidate screenings, Member to Member education



CASE STUDY 1:

Incentivizing fire sprinkler

- Senior GOP Member
- Volunteer fire chief
- Opponent to collective bargaining
- Helped pass cancer presumption



WORKING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Challenges

- Takes time and effort
 - Get to know your elected official and their issues
 - Be visible
- Accept that you won't always agree – even with friends
 - Unlikely allies can pop up anywhere

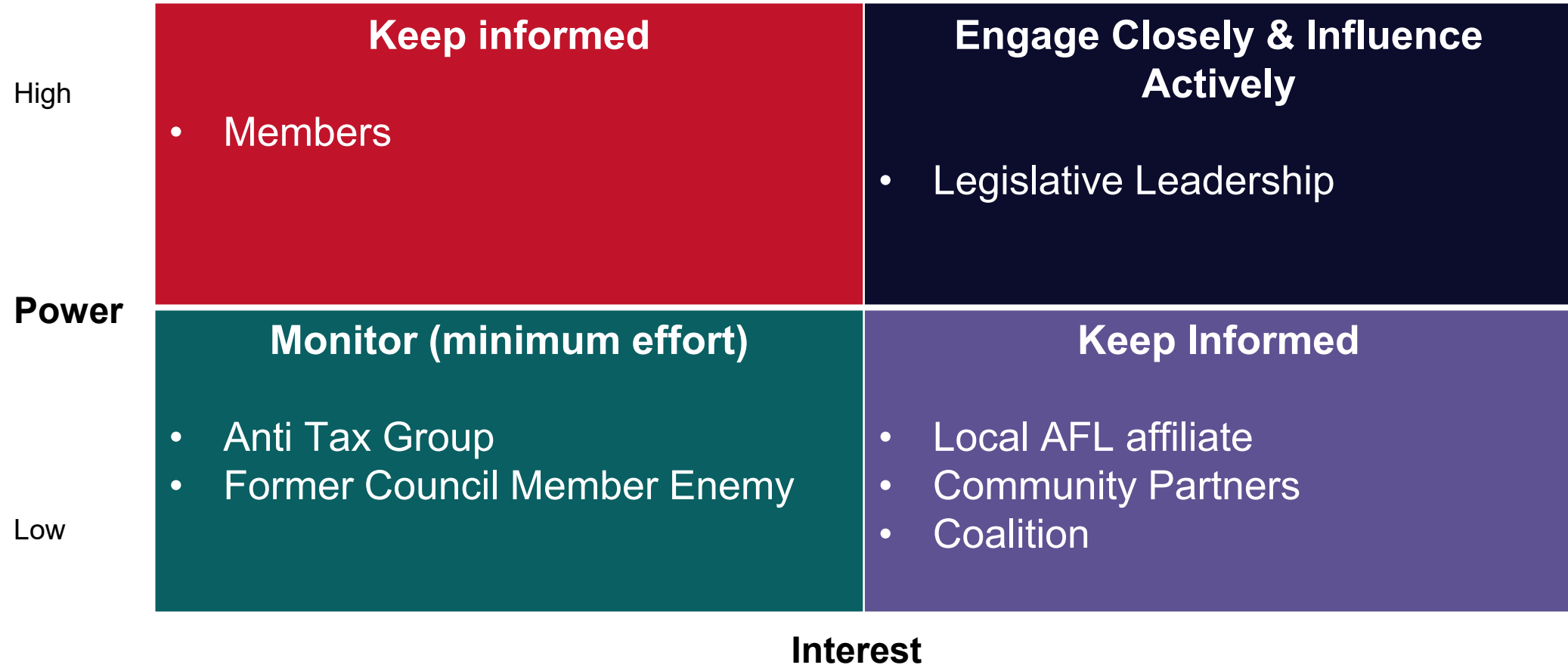


UNDERSTAND THE LEGISLATIVE LANDSCAPE

- Every legislative environment is different — federal, state, provincial, or local — but the fundamentals are the same. To win, you must understand:
 - **who holds power**
 - **how committees operate**
 - **where budget decisions are made**
 - **and how political dynamics shift over time fire service issues often transcend party lines, but the path to passage always depends on understanding the terrain and the people who shape it.**



POWER MAPPING EXAMPLE



POWER MAP HIERARCHY

- **HIGH INFLUENCE — Primary Decision-Maker** (*Color: Red*) • Committee Chair, Agency Director, Governor's Office • Holds final authority to approve or block the objective
- **HIGH INFLUENCE — Direct Influencers** (*Color: Red*) • Leadership (Majority/Minority) • Chief of Staff / Senior Advisors • Key Committee Members • Major organizational or political allies
- **MEDIUM INFLUENCE — Secondary Influencers** (*Color: Yellow*) • Labor organizations and unions • Advocacy groups and policy organizations • Municipal leaders (mayors, councils) • Community leaders and stakeholder groups
- **LOW INFLUENCE — Broader Pressure Sources** (*Color: Gray*) • Constituents and general public opinion • Local media and editorial boards • Business community and economic stakeholders • Social media and narrative drivers



BUILDING A WINNING LEGISLATIVE STRATEGY

- Identify strong bill sponsors
- Build bipartisan support
- Anticipate opposition
- Align your timeline with the legislative calendar. **A winning strategy is proactive, disciplined, and grounded in the realities of the political environment.**



- **Know your target:**
- **Have they supported your issues in the past?**
- **Have you worked with other allied Legislators?**
- **Do you have a member who knows them?**
- **Have you supported their issues in the past?**
- **Have you supported their campaigns**

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

The best way to achieve lobbying success is to develop productive, long-term relationships with decisionmakers



GET TO KNOW WHO SAYS YES

Don't wait until you have an Ask!

- Meetings in District/State
- The Legislator lives in your community
- Are there area events you know they will attend
- Connect with them in person
- Invite them to visit a fire station or union event
- Everyone like to take a picture with the rig
- Show them why they should vote yes



CASE STUDY 2:

Rep. Glenn Thompson (R-PA)

- Senior GOP Member
- Volunteer fire chief
- Opponent to collective bargaining
- Helped pass cancer presumption

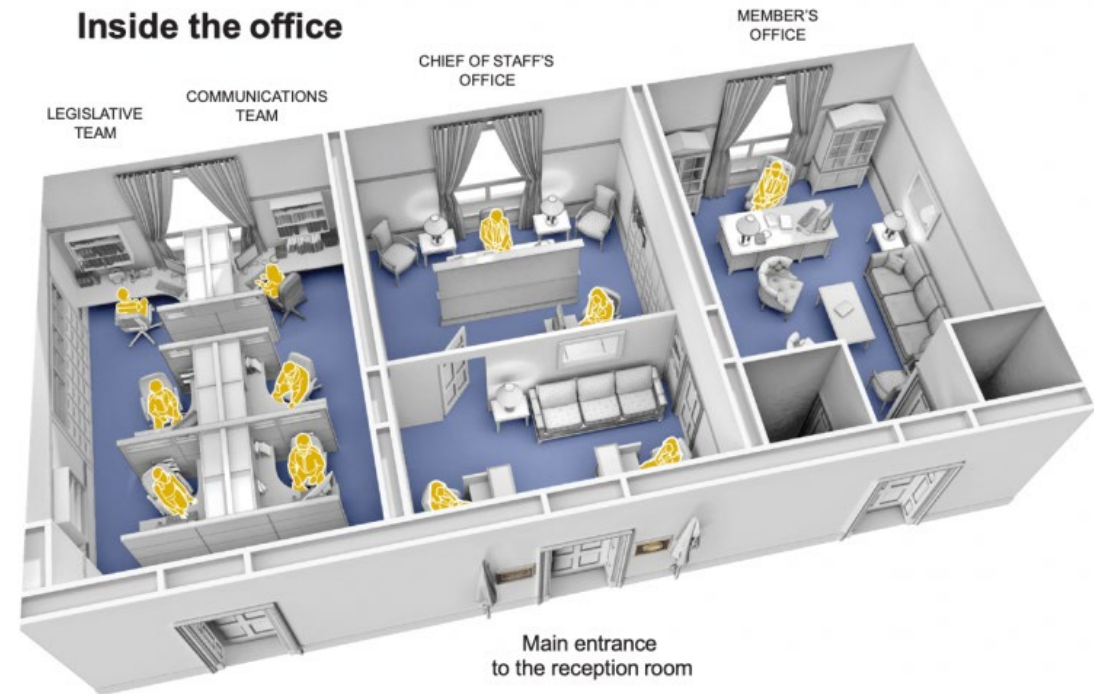
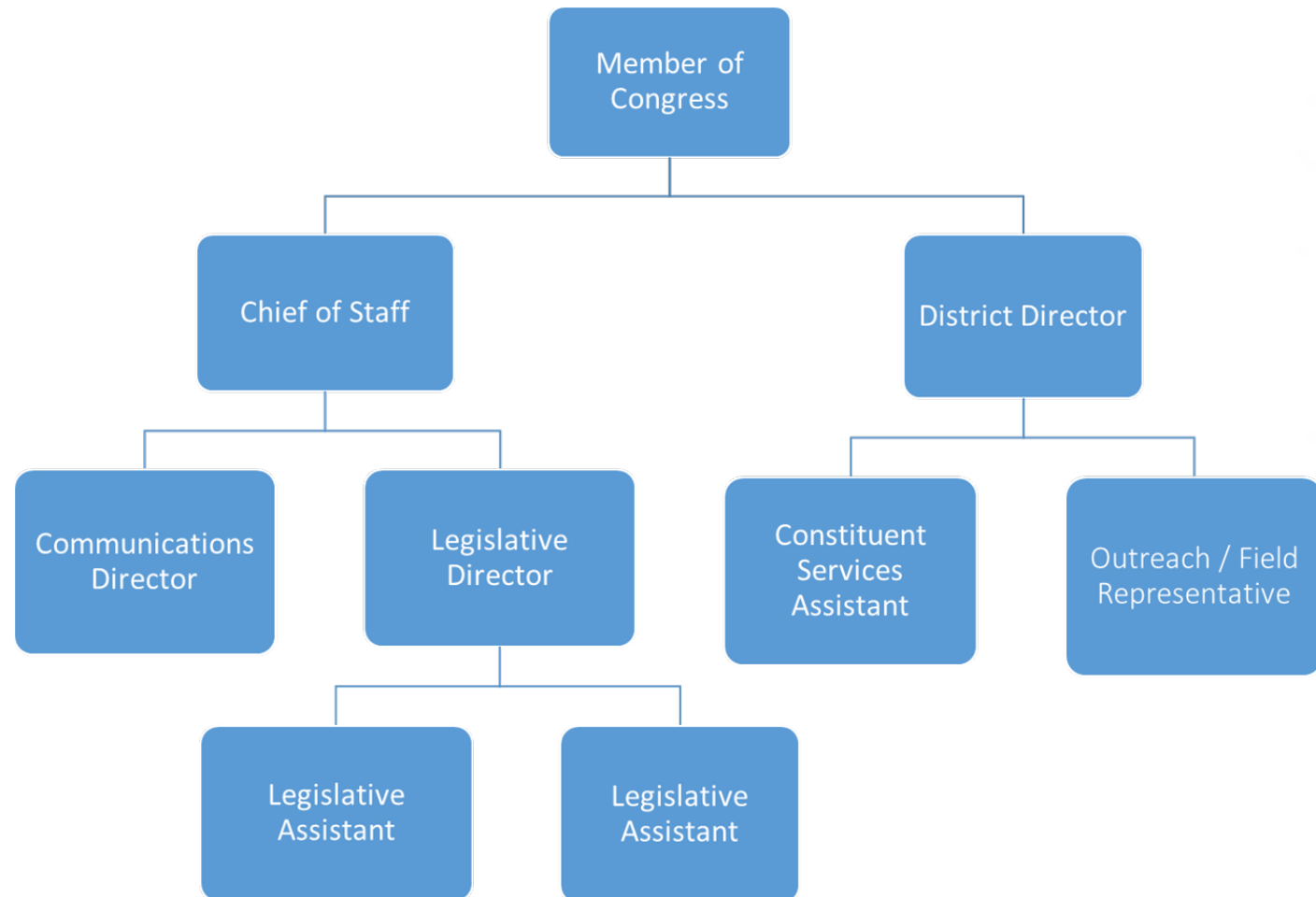


Disposition: Adopted by a Full Committee Roll Call Vote of 31-18

Sponsor/Amendment: Takano Motion to Report H.R. 2499 to the House, with an amendment and with recommendation that the amendment be agreed to, and the bill as amended, do pass

Name & State	Aye	No	Not Voting	Name & State	Aye	No	Not Voting
Mr. SCOTT (VA) (Chairman)	X			Mrs. FOXX (NC) (Ranking)		X	
Mr. GRIJALVA (AZ)	X			Mr. WILSON (SC)		X	
Mr. COURNTEY (CT)	X			Mr. THOMPSON (PA)	X		
Mr. SABLAN (MP)			X	Mr. WALBERG (MI)		X	
Ms. WILSON (FL)	X			Mr. GROTHMAN (WI)		X	
Ms. BONAMICI (OR)	X			Ms. STEFANIK (NY)		X	
Mr. TAKANO (CA)	X			Mr. ALLEN (GA)		X	
Ms. ADAMS (NC)	X			Mr. BANKS (IN)	X		
Mr. DESAULNIER (CA)	X			Mr. COMER (KY)		X	
Mr. NORCROSS (NJ)	X			Mr. FULCHER (ID)		X	
Ms. JAYAPAL (WA)	X			Mr. KELLER (PA)		X	
Mr. MORELLE (NY)	X			Ms. MILLER-MEEKS (IA)		X	
Ms. WILD (PA)	X			Mr. OWENS (UT)		X	
Mrs. MCBATH (GA)	X			Mr. GOOD (VA)		X	
Mrs. HAYES (CT)	X			Mrs. MCCLAIN (MI)		X	
Mr. LEVIN (MI)	X			Mrs. HARSHBARGER (TN)		X	
Ms. OMAR (MN)	X			Mrs. MILLER (IL)	X		
Ms. STEVENS (MI)	X			Mrs. SPARTZ (IN)			X
Ms. LEGER FERNÁNDEZ (NM)	X			Mr. FITZGERALD (WI)		X	
Mr. JONES (NY)	X			Mr. CAWTHORN (NC)	X		
Ms. MANNING (NC)	X			Mrs. STEEL (CA)		X	
Mr. MRVAN (IN)	X			Ms. LETLOW (LA)		X	
Mr. BOWMAN (NY)	X			Mr. JACOBS (NY)		X	

CONGRESSIONAL OFFICE CHART



VALUE OF STAFF

Staff play a critical role in

- Most staff don't have the time to research all issues
- Staff often are young and may not know the district/state
- Be a resource to the staff – explain the local impact of bills
Do their homework for them!
- Staff is the last voice a Legislator hears before voting



MEETING PREP

MEETING PREP



Develop a goal in advance

- *What do you want to achieve?*
- Do you have an “ask” or are you relationship building?

- *What are your asks?*
- Introduce a bill
- Cosponsor a bill
- Vote on a bill
- Be clear --- now is not the time to be timid



- **What is the issue that needs to be addressed?**
- **Why is this issue important?**
- **How can I demonstrate this issue?**
- **What local impacts have occurred as a result of this issue?**
- **How can the elected official be most helpful?**

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF TO PREP



KNOW YOUR ISSUE/ASK

- Do research ahead of time so that you have a confident grasp on your issue and ask.
- Remember that your elected official will look to you for your expertise and recommendations on the topic.
- Develop a one-page summary of the issue and your ask.

The Government Affairs Department can assist



PERSONALIZE YOUR ASK

- Add personal testimony and anecdotes
Humanize your issues and provide local examples
- Personal stories make for more compelling arguments.
- Staff doesn't have the time to understand the local impacts
You can be an extension of their team



DURING THE MEETING

- **Dress Appropriately.** First impressions matter. Make sure your elected sees you as the professional, informed fire fighter that you are.
- **Make the most of your time.** Meetings are often very brief. You may also meet with staff rather than the elected official.
- **Figure out who will say what** in advance and plan how to transition from person to person.
- **Know the current status** of the bills, issues, etc., you are advocating for. Stay consistent and clear with your “asks.”
- **Start with a brief description** of the issue and its impact on your local’s members.
- **Explain the issue’s impact with a personal story.** Elected officials always want to know the specific impact of an issue in their district or state. Data always helps.



DURING THE MEETING

- **Give arguments in favor** – but make sure to also know the opposition’s arguments and prepare for any pushback you may receive.
- **Listen and respond to their questions or thoughts.** You may want to take notes for future conversations.
- **Get a firm commitment on next steps.** Elected officials, and their staff, may be unable to give an immediate answer to your “ask.” However, try to understand how their decision process works and how you can best influence it.
- **Take notes.** Write down any questions or concerns for follow-up conversations.
- **If you do not know the answer to a question, it’s ok. Make sure to follow up later.**
 - You can simply say, “I am not sure, but I would be happy to find out and get back to you.”
 - Never make up an answer. Always establish yourself as a trusted source of information.
 - Being authentic and doing follow-up research is a great way to build your position as a trusted advisor.
- **Reiterate the official’s commitment** or next steps and any ways you can help in their research and decision-making.

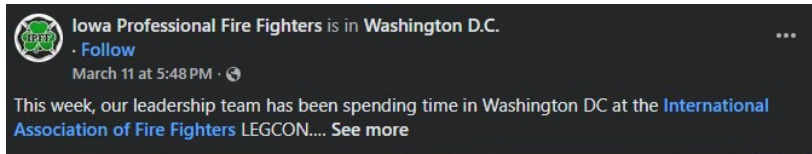
POST MEETING



- **Debrief with those who attended the meeting:**
 - Did you deliver your message?
 - Did you present a clear “ask?”
 - What feedback did you receive?
 - Were there questions that you need to follow up with an answer?
- **Send a thank you note to the official or their staff**
- Email is generally better than physical mail



POST-MEETING SOCIAL MEDIA



- Educate
 - Pushing information
- Empower
 - Using social media platforms to promote information sharing
- Persuade
 - Using information and the platform to reach your target



OTHER INCENTIVES

Be helpful to their priorities

Be helpful politically

Attend rallies

Attend fundraisers



Keep ethics rules and regulations in mind

Don't break the law!




CASE STUDY 3:

Winnipeg wins fight for additional firefighters

- Elected politicians have ignored repeated calls for change.
- Growing population, Increasing call volumes, Fewer firefighters in 2025 than 1970s.
- Sound familiar?



INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FIRE FIGHTERS



Council passes 2026 budget with last-minute change to hire additional firefighters

By: Joyanne Pursaga

Posted: 6:10 PM CST Wednesday, Dec. 17, 2025

BUILD AND DEPLOY A PLAN TO ENGAGE CHANGE

Politicians, Membership, Media, Public

- Build relationships and educate elected officials on issues
- Engage and educate membership on issues, actions and plan
- Develop and foster relationships with local media
- Educate and engage voters on the issues
 - Traditional Media, Social Media, Action Network



BUILD AND DEPLOY A PLAN TO ENGAGE CHANGE



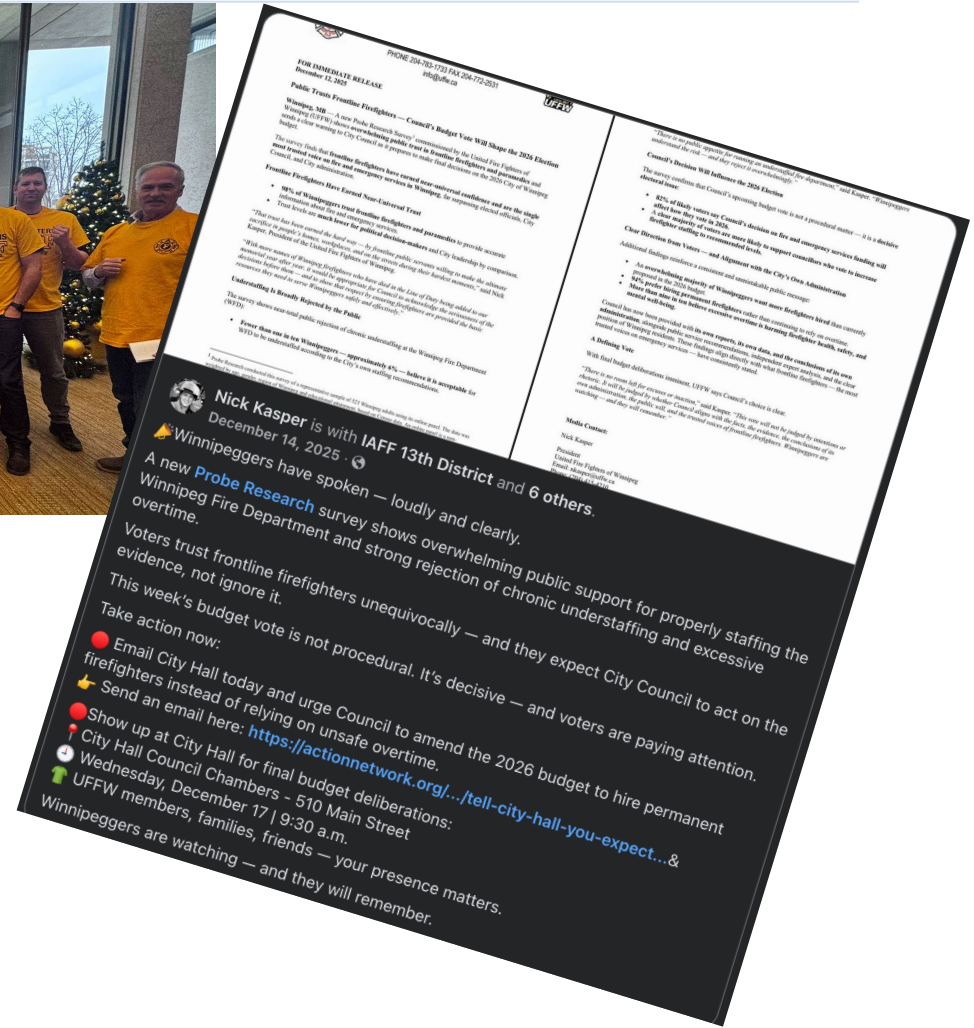
Hire more firefighters, majority of Winnipeggers say
Union 'ringing the warning bell' ahead of budget vote

By: **Joyanne Pursaga**
Posted: 6:03 PM CST Monday, Dec. 15, 2025



CLICK HERE TO
TELL WINNIPEG POLITICIANS
PROTECTING LIVES
NOT POLITICS
IS THEIR TOP PRIORITY

PAID FOR BY WINNIPEG FIREFIGHTERS



EXECUTING THE PLAN

- Multiple meetings with elected officials
- Develop talking points and keep membership informed
- Multiple OpEds sent to local news outlets
- Multiple media interviews
- Utilized social media and Action Network to engage voters
 - Thousands of emails, letters, and messages sent to elected officials



RESULTS

- Winnipeg has a Strong Mayor system
- Executive Policy Committee (EPC) - Handpicked Councilors selected by the Mayor. Serve as Mayor's advisors
- During the December 2025 Budget Hearing, multiple members of the EPC flipped their stance and recommended increased funding for Fire Department – Mayor Flipped!
- City Council unanimously voted to fund 80 new firefighters positions over the 2026 and 2027 budget periods.



CASE STUDY 4:

Austin Firefighters Fight Off Attack On Four Person Staffing

- 2018: Austin City Council passed an ordinance mandating the Four Firefighter Safety Standard on every apparatus.
- 2025: City moves to revoke Four Person staffing and pushes messaging to harm firefighter image.



AUSTIN





City of Austin points to absent firefighters amid concerns over proposed staffing changes

by: Grace Reader
Posted: Jul 29, 2025 / 10:32 AM CDT
Updated: Jul 29, 2025 / 05:24 PM CDT

City of Austin points to absent firefighters amid concerns over proposed staffing changes

CONCERNS OVER PROPOSED STAFFING CHANGES

0:02 / 3:27

SHARE    

Ads by

[Send feedback](#)

[Why this ad?](#)

AUSTIN (KXAN) — Austin Fire Chief Joel Baker and the city of Austin's budget office are now pointing to increasing absenteeism at the fire department as they continue to recommend a [change in the fire department's staffing model](#) in its proposed Fiscal Year 2026 budget.

| [Did you get a text about firefighter staffing? Who sent it and what's going on](#) >

"It is important to note that the proposal does not recommend rescinding the four-person staffing model. Rather, it is the intent to maintain the four-person staffing model while providing flexibility to maintain continuous operations and avoiding unnecessary service reductions or excessive overtime," a memo from Baker and Kerri Lang, director of Budget and Organizational Excellence for the city, said.

QUICK HISTORY

- July 2025 flooding strikes Central Texas
- Fire Chief refuses to send Austin Fire to assist
- Austin membership initiates "Vote of No Confidence" on Chief
- City uses Four Person Staffing as a wedge during negotiations as vote is taking place
- City engages in campaign to paint firefighters abuse of leave



FIGHTING BACK

- Local 975 initiates comprehensive plan to fight back
- Educating elected officials on truth behind leave time use
- Social media to educate public on misinformation presented by the City
- Educational videos for both 1710 as well as leave use
- Video launch coordinated with launch of signature campaign to place ballot measure for Four Person Staffing in City Charter
- City negotiates Four Person Staffing into contract in exchange for Local 975 terminating their ballot measure campaign





Chris "Blue" Bartley

CBartley@iaff.org



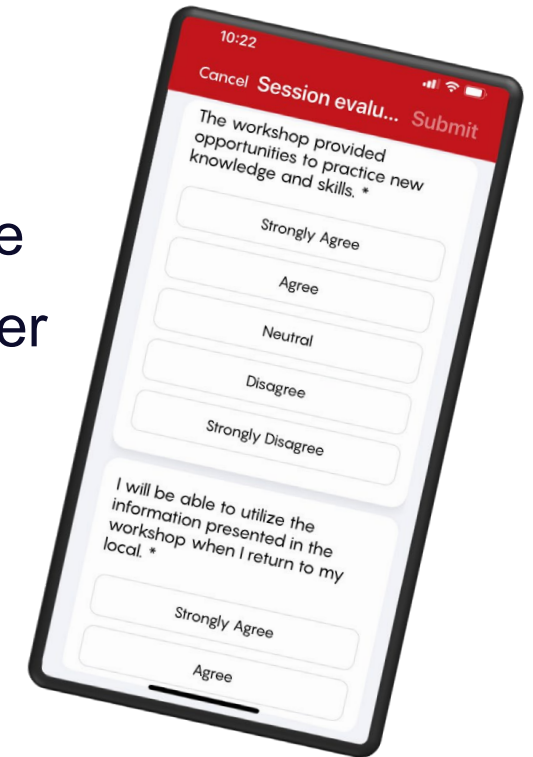
Evan Davis

edavis@iaff.org

THANK YOU!
ANY QUESTIONS?

EVALUATION AND WIN AN IPAD!

- **Submit your workshop and overall evaluations to be automatically entered in two drawings for a new iPad!**
- **Complete your evaluations using the IAFF app:**
 1. Download the IAFF app and sign in with your iaff.org username
 2. Tap the 2026 Strive for Excellence Summit event image to enter the event's dashboard
 3. Tap "Sessions" and tap on the workshops you attended
 4. Tap "Evaluation" and complete the evaluation
 5. Tap "Submit"



For the event's overall evaluation, follow steps 1 and 2, then tap "Event Evaluation" located in the event's Dashboard.

