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EDITORIALS

Voters Didn't Elect An Arbitrator To Run City

Binding arbitration between management and city unions on non-pay issues sounds better in theory than in practice.

Every working Albuquerquean can sympathize with downtrodden wage-earners in theory. But water lines often break after 5 p.m., buses ought to run on weekends and stray dogs don't keep banker's hours. And in practice, somebody who works for the city should be counted on to fix the leak, drive the Rapid Ride and pick up the pet.

With that established, Councilor Debbie O'Malley has amended her joint proposal with Councilor Rey Garduño to allow for such duties as a matter of "management rights." She has also exempted discipline of employees over drug or alcohol use.

So what, exactly, is left? If pay issues are handled in contract negotiations and the administration has at least some sway over scheduling and can enforce its zero-tolerance drug policy, what will taxpayers be footing half of the legal bills for in a binding arbitration?

O'Malley, who could use union backing in her expected run for mayor, mentions employee grievances. She says the measure "will encourage people to come up with a resolution. Neither side wants to go to binding arbitration." Make that no taxpayer should have to pay extra for ironing that dirty laundry.

Andrew Padilla, president of the state chapter of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, says it's a fairness issue because unions "have no recourse except District Court" in disputes with the city. That's the same place non-city employees seek recourse against employers.

The city's existing labor regulations already allow sides to enter voluntary arbitration to settle contract talks, including pay raises. Adding a binding arbitration clause could throw those regs into question, along with the administration's ability to govern.

The mayor should veto this proposal.