

White Settlement School board President **Randy Armstrong** isn't quitting, no matter what the Texas Legislature says.

A new law meant to prevent conflicts of interest will force **Armstrong** out as board president in 2020 — unless he quits his real job.

That's because he works at the **Tarrant Appraisal District**. That agency decides what your home is worth so the school **district** can collect taxes on it.

Yes, the Legislature untangled some awful problems with **appraisal** districts this year. In particular, Fort Worth-based TAD has been secretive, unaccountable and poorly run.

But along the way to reform, the Legislature also created new tangles for a few school districts, cities and local boards that count on volunteers — including **appraisal district** employees like **Armstrong** — for thankless, unpaid service.

**Armstrong**, 62, of Fort Worth, isn't above the law. But he said he might have found a way around it.

A columnist in The Dallas Morning News already celebrated that he is "out of a job."

**Armstrong** claims that the way the law is written, if he gives up the president's gavel, he can remain on the board. The law says an **appraisal district** may not employ "officers" of a local school board or taxing entity.

The News credited White Settlement resident Daniel "Joe" Bennett with getting the law changed to end **Armstrong's** dual role as both chief residential appraiser and president of a school board that sets a tax rate.

Since 2017, the West Texas-funded activist group Empower Texans has lobbied for the law, focusing on Denton chief appraiser Rudy Durham, also a 25-year Lewisville councilman and mayor.

In his 18 years on the board, **Armstrong** has seen the White Settlement school **district** grow from serving the working-class community around Lockheed Martin Aeronautics to a new Brewer High School and a sprawling open-enrollment **district** of 6,700 students, most living in west Fort Worth.

There are few people with deeper roots in White Settlement than **Armstrong**, a 1975 Brewer graduate.

"I'm an advocate for public schools and public school students," he said.

"I feel like I'm being targeted because of where I work."

He's right.

The News said the bill was filed in the house by state Rep. Matt Krause (R-Fort Worth) on behalf of Bennett, a frequent **appraisal district** critic unhappy with the response to a protest.

Bennett himself ran unsuccessfully for the **appraisal** board in 2017. For such an obscure office, he had high-powered Republican backing from Ken Brolin, a national organizer for the presidential campaigns of Newt Gingrich, Herman Cain and U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz.

"I just feel like there was somebody out there with an ax to grind," **Armstrong** said.

The bill stalled but passed later as part of the **appraisal** reform bill, Senate Bill 2.

Most of the law is a vast improvement that will make **appraisal** districts better and more responsive,

**Armstrong** said.

"It's just this one part — it affects employees who volunteer in the community," he said.

"Basically, they've allowed these guys to come in and dictate who can run in local elections."

It's just like a tax **appraisal**.

He can protest.

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