

Your Two Nouns Magazine

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Article Title: Plan to set SF parking rates based on demand is approved

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Beginning in mid-January, motorists who park in the city's 30,200 metered spaces, or in its lots and garages, will be charged more during peak times and less when demand isn't as high. Hourly rates will vary by time of day and block by block and be adjusted up or down four times a year, depending on actual use during the previous quarter.

The Municipal Transportation Agency board approved the plan Tuesday on a 5-0 vote.

Although several U.S. cities have experimented with limited versions of demand-based pricing, San Francisco is the first one to apply the system across the city.

MTA planners say their goal is to increase the availability of coveted city parking spaces, particularly in areas where demand is high. Where demand-based rates are raised, drivers will be motivated to shorten their stays. Or they will park outside of high-demand blocks, where rates are lower, or even leave their cars at home.

Either way, the number of people cruising through neighborhoods during high-demand times will be reduced, and more spots will open up sooner, said Hank Willson, the MTA's parking policy manager. The intent, he said, is to make sure a space or two is available on each block.

"It is so exciting to see this go citywide," board Chairwoman Cheryl Brinkman said after the vote. "It will be invisible to most people — but they will be able to find a parking place."

No one spoke at Tuesday's meeting in opposition, although the head of one merchants group asked for a delay, saying he'd been unaware of the proposal. On the streets, and in the coffee shops, however, some merchants and residents described the effort as a money-grab and likened it to the despised surge pricing strategies used by ride-hailing services.

Because rates can't increase more than 25 cents a month, Willson said, it would take years for them to rise significantly. But, he said the MTA expects parking revenues to remain flat overall.

In areas that have had the demand-based rates, he said, "the best thing you can say is that it's been a nonissue. Nobody notices."

About 7,000 of the city's meters already employ the demand-based rate program. The idea got its start in 2011 when the city embarked on a three-year federally funded test in several neighborhoods where parking is in short demand.

The MTA declared the program, known as SFpark, a success, and continued it in some of the city's busiest neighborhoods — downtown, South of Market, the Mission, the Embarcadero, Fisherman's Wharf, Mission Bay, the Fillmore and the Marina.

At the same time, the city replaced its old mechanical coin-only meters with electronic meters that take credit cards, parking cards or coins, and allow motorists to pay by mobile phone. The meters are linked, allowing them to be remotely monitored and programmed, enabling the MTA to measure demand and adjust rates.

With citywide expansion in January, the program will reach for the first time into San Francisco's western end as well as many largely residential neighborhoods and smaller commercial districts. Under the program, the MTA reviews hourly rates every three months, and decides whether to raise or lower them, in 25-cent increments, or leave them unchanged. The decisions are based on how many vacant metered spaces are typically available on a block during three times of day: morning, midday and evenings.

Rates can go as low as 50 cents an hour during low-demand times or as high as \$8 an hour at peak times, according to MTA policy, but the highest rate now is \$7 an hour. The average rate at the existing 7,000 demand-based parking spaces, Willson said, is about \$2.50.

MTA officials balked at any comparisons with surge pricing, saying that the rate increases are neither instantaneous nor unlimited and are clearly displayed on meters or at garage entrances.

"And surge pricing only goes up," Willson said. "This goes down, too."

Jim Lazarus, policy director for the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, said the organization welcomes the new way of setting parking meter rates and called the test program "unusually successful."

"This program isn't raising rates just to be raising rates," he said. "It's tied to demand" and making

more metered spaces available.

Steven Cornell, head of the Council of District Merchants Associations, an umbrella group for neighborhood business groups, said his organization hadn't been included in discussions and asked for a delay. Then he admitted the group would likely support the plan.

"We're probably going to say it's wonderful," he said. "But I don't like to be kept in the dark."

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Article Title: Senator Al Franken Resigning Amid Sexual Harassment Allegations

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WASHINGTON — Senator Al Franken of Minnesota announced Thursday he would resign “in the coming weeks” from the Senate after his support among Democrats crumbled, becoming the highest-profile casualty in the growing list of lawmakers felled by charges of sexual harassment or indiscretions.

“I of all people am aware that there is some irony in the fact that I am leaving while a man who has bragged on tape about his history of sexual assault sits in the Oval Office, and a man who has repeatedly preyed on young girls campaigns for the Senate with the full support of his party,” Mr. Franken said.

His references to both President Trump, who been accused of inappropriate sexual behavior including harassment and assault, and Roy S. Moore, the Republican nominee for an Alabama Senate seat who faces allegations that he molested teenagers, followed Mr. Franken’s steadfast denial that he himself had done anything wrong.

Mr. Franken said he had been ready to “cooperate fully” with a Senate Ethics Committee investigation but that he decided to leave office because it became clear he could not both pursue the investigation and represent the people of Minnesota. He maintained that he would have ultimately been cleared.

“Some of the allegations against me are simply not true,” Mr. Franken said. “Others I remember very differently.”

He went on to say he felt confident he had represented the people of Minnesota well. “I know in my heart, nothing that I have done as a senator, nothing, has brought dishonor on this institution, and I am confident that the Ethics Committee would agree,” he said.

He also said he was “shocked” and “upset” by the harassment allegations and that in responding to the claims, he may have given people the “false impression” that he was admitting to any of the accusations. He added that he planned to continue to be a “champion” for women and would be active outside of the Senate.

“Even on the worst day of my political life, I feel like it has all been worth it,” he said. “Politics, Paul Wellstone told us, is about the improvement of people’s lives. I know that the work I have been able to do has improved people’s lives. I would do it all over again in a heartbeat.”

Nearly all of the Senate’s Democratic women — and most Democratic men, including the Senate’s top two Democrats — called for Mr. Franken to resign after a sixth woman came forward to charge that he had made an improper advance on her.

“Enough is enough,” declared Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, Democrat of New York.

The accusations against Mr. Franken include an episode of forcible kissing on a U.S.O. tour before he was elected and several allegations that he groped women as he posed with them for photographs.

“This decision is not about me,” he said Thursday. “It is about the people of Minnesota.”

Over the last three weeks, Mr. Franken has repeatedly apologized for his behavior, although he has also challenged some of the accusations of impropriety lodged against him. Until Wednesday, he had said he would remain in his job and work with a Senate Ethics Committee investigation of his case. But his Democratic colleagues in the Senate made clear on Wednesday that his apologies and admissions were not enough.

Still on Thursday, dozens of Mr. Franken’s Democratic colleagues, including many who just a day before made his political future in the Senate all but impossible, gathered on the Senate floor to watch his remarks, along with members of Mr. Franken’s staff and family. One by one, they rose to embrace him.

Senator Jeff Flake of Arizona, the only Republican on the floor of the chamber, said, “He is my friend and he did the right thing.”

Moments after Mr. Franken’s remarks, Senator Tammy Duckworth, Democrat of Illinois, said she wanted to thank him “for doing the right thing.”

Leaving the Capitol shortly after, Mr. Franken said he would not be taking questions.

“I’ll be coming home,” he said when asked if he had a message for his home state.

Woohoo, you made it to the end!