

Together Toward a Sustainable Future

by Tom Lynch

While state employees face 15 percent pay cuts and local city governments bear the loss of wages, jobs and services, the Sonoma County Association of Retired Employees states that county administrators recently gave all 4,000 active county employees increases of \$10,000 in annual compensation. That \$40 million cost is funded by draconian cuts in employee health care, retirement attrition and layoffs of up to 150 less senior county staff. So, for the eighth year in a row, there will be a diminishment in the essential services that Sonoma County taxpayers rely upon the county to perform with their hard-earned tax dollars.

This \$40 million includes \$28 million to pay for a \$600 a month cash allowance, plus \$12 million toward the county's match on wages to fund the retirement benefits of all employees and elected representatives.

For every dollar in salary, there is an additional 7.5 percent toward unfunded retiree medical obligations, an 8 percent payment on \$275 million in pension obligation bonds, 16 percent to the Sonoma County Employee Retirement Association's retirement fund, 7.65 percent to Social Security and Medicare and 4 percent to 11 percent for 401(a) accounts for management and elected officials.

A recent Segal actuarial study projected county contributions to the retirement fund will double over the next five years.

The cash allowance is causing major cuts throughout the county, with profound social consequences. This raise increases the unfunded portion of the county pension portfolio another 40 percent as well.

Why are we going through all these machinations? Instead of major cuts in family medical care for county employees, perhaps we could adopt a simple freeze on health benefits and work in some higher deductibles and generic drugs. Must we start laying off our less senior workers so soon, for such specious reasons? Are there not alternatives before we start eating our seed corn by cannibalizing our county work force?

The average compensation — salary and benefits — for the top 1,000 (25 percent) county staff is now more than \$170,000 per year. Employees are paid annually for 2,080 hours,

while working on average 1,680 hours with 400 hours, 10 weeks, one out of five days off for sick leave, vacation, holidays, etc. Dare we ask county workers to forgo raises or take a little cut in pay, perhaps reduce the amount of paid time off so that we may keep other staff from losing their jobs?

Cuts in county staff are cuts in essential services. During unprecedented economic times, we need our county work force to help tend to the least of thee among us.

The county staff works very hard for a sometimes difficult public. Their efforts are often unappreciated. I believe every one of them would gladly participate in reduced hours, furloughs, salary cuts, etc. to help fellow workers avoid losing their jobs. Why are the unions and management not pursuing these other options?

Contra Costa County's CEO is warning his supervisors that in order to cover unfunded obligations, the county will have to lay off 25 percent of its 8,000-person work force over the next three years. Santa Barbara County is having joint supervisor and pension board meetings to discuss major pension portfolio losses. San Mateo County is working collaboratively with all stakeholders toward making government services more sustainable.

Locally, Mead Clark Lumber, Aaction Rents, Agilent and numerous other businesses have tried to avoid layoffs with across-the-board pay cuts. Where is the leadership and vision commensurate with the challenges ahead? So much of the solution is a temporary cut, and Sonoma County is giving raises?

Have we become the proverbial frogs sitting in a pan of water over an open flame doing nothing while the water comes to a boil? Has county government become so insular and jaded to what's happening that officials would seriously consider laying off less senior workers, many of them on the front lines, to provide raises to those who remain?

There is a shift within county government toward more realistic change. Hopefully, a rescission of the cash allowance will be among the reforms. The hope of many rests on the journey toward more creative, innovative and sustainable solutions with the budget challenges ahead.

Tom Lynch is a Guerneville builder and a member of the Sonoma County Planning Commission.

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Clothes Line Etiquette & Helpful Hints

Provided by The Legacy Fabric & Notions Shop
Sebastopol – Benefits Sebeastopol Senior Center

Information gathered here is from recent discussions (lively discussions) with Legacy Ladies and our customers. These are the real old wives' tales.

1. Hang your unmentionables hidden from view. Hang towels, shirts, or sheets around or in front of the items needing discretion.
2. Pants will dry faster with the pockets turned out.
3. To minimize stiff, scratchy towels of being sun-dried, do a partial dry in the dryer and finish in the sun. (or visa-versa).
4. Hang Rayon shirts on a plastic hanger on the line-they will come out perfect.
5. To give clothes the appearance of being ironed, give them a good snap, hang by side seams if possible and smooth things out with your clean hands. Hang pants by the matching seams of the hem and hang by making a crease front and back.
6. Use your clothes pins efficiently- One pin can pinch two items strung together.
7. Use the sun efficiently. If the laundry is out early, on a hot day, you can easily dry 3 loads of laundry or more.
8. Hang sock by the toes so the cuff doesn't dry in a funny shape.

And the 3 most important facts/tips:

9. We don't usually have that opportunity to look at the condition of the clothes when just tossing from machine to machine. Take the opportunity to look at each garment for an inspection of loose buttons, need for mending, discoloration, etc.
10. Clothes will naturally have a fresh smell that we try to capture with layers of fragrances from fabric softeners to dryer sheets.
11. Hanging clothes on the line, hearkens back to a simpler time. A peaceful, quiet time listening to birds while doing the chores. It can be relaxing with the right attitude.

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