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Supervisor pay raise in hands of voters / Proposal on S.F. ballot makes job full time

Rachel Gordon, Chronicle Staff Writer Published 4:00 am, Monday, October 7, 2002

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There's no question that **San Francisco supervisors** are low paid when compared to their counterparts in the rest of the state. The thornier question is whether they should get more money.

San Francisco voters will answer that Nov. 5 when they consider a proposal to officially make the job of supervisor a full-time gig and authorize the **Civil Service Commission** to set the salary, taking it out of the hands of the electorate.

While a raise is not guaranteed, it's likely, since the commission will consider the salaries of other city council and county supervisors in California when setting the amount.

Members of other boards of supervisors in the Bay Area, and in other big cities in the state, have average annual salaries of \$88,000. That bumps up to \$118,000 when benefits are factored in, according to San Francisco City Controller **Ed Harrington**. San Francisco's 11 supervisors earn \$37,585 a year, or about \$47,000 when fringe benefits are included.

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In Alameda County, supervisors earn \$108,996; in Santa Clara the pay is \$104,441. The statewide average pay for county supervisors is nearly \$52,000. In Los Angeles they make more than \$133,000 -- the highest in the state.

While San Francisco has more supervisors than any other county, which each have five, it also is unique in that it's a combined city and county. There is no city council.

A salary boost, said San Francisco Board of Supervisors President Tom Ammiano, "would be fair, given the cost of living in the city. I don't think anyone's trying to become a millionaire."

The board placed the measure on the ballot.

Ammiano, a former public school teacher, supplements his board salary with a periodic teaching job at **San Francisco State University**. And as a stand-up comic, he also pulls in money from performing and emceeing events.

Another supervisor, **Tony Hall**, helps make ends meet as a singer. Some supervisors quit their jobs; **Sophie Maxwell** was a railroad electrician before she won election two years ago. Others tinkered with their careers. Supervisor **Gerardo Sandoval**, for instance, was a public defender; now, he has a private law practice working on personal injury cases.

All the supervisors say their official duties are more than part time -- as the City Charter now describes the job -- with some saying they put in 40 to 60 hours a week representing their districts.

But **David Lee**, a local political analyst and executive director of the Chinese American Voters **Education** Committee, said **Proposition J** isn't just about whether the job should pay more.

"It's a huge referendum on the board's performance," Lee said.

If people are happy with the board, he said, they'll vote yes on Proposition J. If they're unhappy, they will probably vote no.

Ammiano conceded that could be the case. But he also urged voters to look at the bigger

picture and ask themselves whether the job itself merits more money. "If you don't like a supervisor, then vote them out of office," he said.

The measure has the support of the **San Francisco Chamber of Commerce**, San Francisco Common Cause -- a government watchdog group -- and the **San Francisco Democratic Party**. They say higher pay will attract more candidates and provide a fairer compensation for the work.

One opponent is **Mara Kopp**, wife of **Quentin Kopp**, a **Superior Court** judge who served for years in the Legislature and on the board. She chairs the group **Good Government Alliance** and said one flaw with Proposition J was that it would take away voters' "time-honored right" to set supervisors' salaries. She added that the supervisors knew full well what the pay would be when they ran for office.

Sandoval, who has taken a lead in the Yes on J campaign, said the extra dough would give him more time to devote to his City Hall job.

"I feel awkward asking San Franciscans to give us a raise, but my choice is to look for another way to supplement my income or spend that time looking after my constituents' concerns," said Sandoval, who set up a political action committee to support the ballot measure.

Lee, whose organization conducted a poll earlier this summer, found support and opposition to Proposition J evenly split. Passage will be difficult, he said, given so many big-ticket money items sharing next month's ballot and a struggling economy.

Supervisors last got a raise in 1998, when the pay bolted from \$23,924 to \$37,585. Last year, voters tacked on health and retirement benefits.

So what would Ammiano do with the extra money? "It's called a roof," he said.

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