

# SanLuisObispo

## County should set rules on how supervisors get pay increases

By John Peschong

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John Peschong

JAYSON MELLOM — The Tribune

In political campaigns for San Luis Obispo County supervisor, there has been a tradition of candidates using the pay increases that supervisors vote for themselves as a campaign issue. Then, once the candidates are sworn in, they vote to give themselves a raise.

This hypocrisy hardly meets the level of good conduct our public servants so often pride themselves on during election season.

In the 2008 supervisory election, candidate Adam Hill used a pay raise as a campaign issue against his opponent. In all of his speeches and campaign material, his opponent's pay raise was made an issue. In December, Supervisor Adam Hill joined three other supervisors in voting in favor of increasing compensation for the Board of Supervisors.

When asked for justification for such a raise, one supervisor thought the board's leadership made them deserving of the raise; Supervisor Bruce Gibson compared San Luis Obispo County's wages to those of other counties, and appointed Supervisor Caren Ray believed the wages for a supervisor should be livable and competitive.

To all of those arguments, I ask: What ever happened to the honor of public service and protecting taxpayer money?

Longevity and money should not be the goal of an accomplished county supervisor. Leadership is expected and is often the cornerstone of most campaign messages. A pay raise should not be given for achieving the goals and delivering the leadership one promises when running for public office.

When comparing San Luis Obispo County supervisors' wages to other counties, most notably Santa Cruz County's \$146,000 wage, I believe Supervisor Gibson is comparing in the wrong direction.

As a public servant committed to improving every corner of our county, Supervisor Gibson should have compared his wages within our county instead of looking outward.

The median household income of residents in San Luis Obispo County is \$58,697 according to the U.S. Census Bureau. That's nearly 30 percent less than the \$86,115 our supervisors make. Every tax dollar our supervisors use for their wages instead of projects within our borders will only increase the gap between those two numbers.

Ray's desire for a livable and competitive wage (at \$86,115 and counting) only drives a divide between the community and their representatives. A public servant should be an experienced and seasoned individual who has worked hard and can contribute authentically to bettering our community.

When the argument continues to be made that a higher salary will attract more qualified individuals, we begin creating career politicians rather than true public servants.

Now, with all of this said, raises are a part of life. The market changes, and today's salary may not be enough tomorrow. Until Proposition 12 passed in 1970, the state legislature set supervisors' salaries. Now each county employs its own techniques for doling out raises. In Yolo County, the supervisors have set theirs at 33 percent of a Superior Court Judge's salary, and it increases when appropriate. Until recently, Placer County had a flat cap. Others cap with a clause for inflation, while others still put raises and caps to the voters as a referendum.

Contra Costa County supervisors voted themselves a 33 percent pay raise last November after the election and then repealed that same pay raise two months later after opponents gathered enough signatures to force a referendum on the pay raise.

I believe at least a few rules should be set for the supervisors in San Luis Obispo County.

When running for office, the candidate is agreeing to a particular salary: four years of service in exchange for a determined compensation. As a result, increases in salaries are not given to oneself immediately, but rather proposed for the coming term of office.

To maintain this, any proposed increase to salaries should be made before the close of candidate filing in an

election year. Thus, job duties and the wages that are paid for the job are already determined for whoever should decide to run for supervisor.

Not all supervisors come up for election at the same time; some might be compensated differently until their seat begins a new term.

Raising your own salary should always be a campaign issue. A candidate should be able to reasonably defend why he or she felt a raise was appropriate. If the raise was passed, then it will ultimately be up to the voters to decide which candidate meets the qualifications and is deserving of the higher compensation.

And in the end, maybe we can get more than one or two supervisors on the board who place the priorities of the county and our tax dollars ahead of their political careers.

John Allan Peschong served in President Ronald Reagan's administration and as a senior strategist for the campaigns of President George W. Bush. He is a founding partner of Meridian Pacific Inc., a public relations company, and serves as chairman of the San Luis Obispo County Republican Party. His column appears twice a month in The Tribune, in rotation with liberal columnist Tom Fulks.

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