



Santa Barbara County Supervisors Back Off 9% Pay Hike

Future pay increases linked to Consumer Price Index

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SANTA MARIA, Calif. -

The Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors formed an independent, ad-hoc committee to study where its compensation ranks among comparable size counties in the state.

The committee reported back to the Board Tuesday its total compensation of about \$105,000 a year is below the average of the comparable counties.

"I think we should take great pride in that over the years the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors has been one of the lowest in terms of compensation", said

First District Supervisor Salud Carbajal, "I think the residents of Santa Barbara County should take great pride in that the previous Board of Supervisors, including the existing Board of Supervisors, have really paid themselves less compared to almost all other counties."

The committee presented different pay increase scenarios that would put the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors in parity with the other, comparable counties.

"Parity has already been reached, and it was reached in December of 2014", said a staff assistant for Fourth District Supervisor Peter Adam during a special presentation before the Board, "specifically December 2, 2014, item A-22 where the Board passed a resolution increasing Supervisorial benefits by 9 percent."

"When you add in the wages and the total retirement health costs on average Santa Barbara County has again on average across the Supervisors about \$122,000 a year in wages and benefits cost to the taxpayer."

"I think we should evaluate ourselves much more on the fiscal health of the County and whether or not we are taking care of our infrastructure needs when we evaluate what our job performance is and I would give us a D as a job performance rating", said Supervisor Adam, the lone opponent to any pay raise for the Board, "I would suggest we don't need a raise and potentially, if you evaluate us on that basis like stockholders would look at the Board of Directors of a company, I think that although we cannot be fired we should probably have our pay cut but I don't think I will make that motion because I'm pretty sure I won't get a second."

Supervisor Adam defended his staunch resistance to any pay raise and was noticeably irritated by comments about his position by Supervisor Carbajal.

"Its one thing to kick up a lot of political dust, to make a lot of political statements that sound good in the media", Carbajal said, "its easy to be political, in front of the media, to show how you are a champion of fiscal conservatism, but yet to not live up to that I just think its abhorrent to have such contradiction, to be such of a hypocrite."

"I think anytime a Board person is in a position of looking at a salary increase for themselves, its always very awkward", said Second District and Board Chair Janet Wolf.

A sentiment echoed by Fifth District County Supervisor Steve Lavagnino who proposed an annual Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) pegged to the Consumer Price Index (CPI), currently just below 3%.

"I haven't really been pleased, I have to say, sometimes this brings out the worst in people", Lavagnino said, "instead of just saying, hey I think your probably shouldn't get a raise, I think some people have tried to diminish what we do, I don't think that's helpful either."

Three of the four County Supervisors meeting in Santa Maria Tuesday voted in support of the annual COLA increase, with Third District Supervisor Doreen Farr absent and Supervisor Adam voting no.

Only three people spoke against the proposed pay raises for the Supervisors during public comment.

"I don't begrudge anybody getting COLA's, you know I don't mind if you put a COLA in there for every year, I think COLA's are a decent thing to do", said Andy Caldwell of the Coalition of Labor, Agriculture and Business (COLAB) about the pay raises.

Caldwell said COLAB's concern is with each County Supervisor's large support staff.

"If you've got 3 or 4 people helping you, that cuts down on the amount of work you do including the time commitment, plus it drives up the cost to the taxpayer of how much your office is costing the taxpayers", Caldwell said, "we look at you not as County employees, nor do we look at being a Board of Supervisor as a career choice, we look at it as service."

"If you go out to the body politic and you ask the average resident, the average taxpayer, do you believe that the County Board of Supervisors should get a raise, I just think politically, I think the reality is it would be an overwhelming no", added Joe Armendariz of the Santa Barbara County Taxpayers Association.

The 3-1 vote for COLA increases for the Board of Supervisors will be reviewed again during the County's annual budget cycle later in the year.

Members of the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors backed away from a proposed 9% pay raise on Tuesday, but the board will now see annual raises tied to the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

Supervisors in Santa Barbara County currently earn just over \$84,000 per year. The number, while significant, was found to be about 30% less than Supervisors in other counties such as San Luis Obispo. A proposal from a committee gave Supervisors the option of approving a 9% pay increase for themselves, which would be \$108,000 a year annually.

Instead, Supervisors decided to pursue annual pay raises that would be considered a cost of living adjustment, or COLA. COLA rates are linked to economic indicators such as the CPI, which measures the cost of various items to determine increases or decreases in the cost of living.

The 3-1 decision was made on a motion by North County 5th District Supervisor Steve Lavagnino. The motion passed with North County 4th District Supervisor Peter Adam the only no vote. Adams opposes any increase for the board. Supervisor Doreen Farr was absent and did not vote.

The decision means no immediate pay increase, and any future raises only during the regular budget cycle. Tied to the CPI, pay hikes could be zero percent, but no higher than 3% each year.

Reporter Keith Carls is working on this story and will provide updates throughout the afternoon and on evening newscasts at 5:00 and 6:00 p.m.

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