

Board Seems to View County Salaries Differently

November 21, 2024



The Del Norte Board of Supervisors discussed and passed items 32 and 38 on Tuesday's Agenda, both unanimously.

- Item 32 extended the authorization for the Sheriff to hire new employees at a step higher than A but no higher than Step C, as initially approved by the Board in May, for a period of six months. The extension for an additional six months was approved.
- Item 38 approved and adopted Salary Resolutions for Unrepresented Classifications including Elected Dept. Heads, Appointed Dept. Heads, Assistant Dept. Heads, Deputy Branch Directors, Confidential Classifications, and Undersheriff Classification. The Board approved a five percent increase as recommended by the Board's Chief Negotiator Deborah Muchmore (no pun intended).

The two issues appeared to collide in public comments, and it grew contentious.

Public Speaker Sam Strait expressed his "disgust" supervisors quibbled over "nickles and dimes" for compensating deputies a living wage which Strait said was \$10 an hour less than the State average. The discussion became contentious when significant raises were voted for administrative staff which might add several thousands onto upper level administrative salaries. Strait strongly criticized the pending approval of administrators who he says "sit in cozy offices while rank and file employees salaries are so low."

Public Speaker Linda Sutter said, "five percent raise is outrageous! Sutter condemned supervisors and with a high level of sarcasm and scorn in her comments saying, "50 cent increase in hourly wages to employees... you are so generous." She stated the Board's position on the increase resembled Bell, California which has been labeled a corrupt city, according to the Los Angeles Times.

Norma Williams, SEIU 1021 Chapter president was a bit more subdued but nonetheless expressed her disappointment with the Board's decision to compensate unrepresented employees with the increase while stalling in addressing rank and file Union employees. Williams stated, "We (represented union members) provide all the services to the public. The public contacts us and expects services. When it comes to employees, you (supervisors) get pretty damn stingy."

Williams predicted a grim future of employee flight unless the Board addresses salary disparities.

Board response included a fair amount of frustration. Supervisor Valerie Starkey said, "I'm a little fired up. Some of the information (presented) is inaccurate." Starkey said she was constrained from commenting because of Closed Session protocol.

The Triplicate has offered P.2 Guest Commentary opportunities to all Supervisors including Supervisor Starkey. With the exception of Board Chair Dean Wilson, no other supervisor has opted to contribute to The Triplicate for individual comment.

To date, Starkey's claims of 'inaccuracies' have not been substantiated.