

El Dorado supes' budget shakeup impacts Tahoe office

By Kathryn Reed

An effort for El Dorado County Board of Supervisors to be on equal financial footing isn't working out that way, according to some supervisors. The Tahoe office was hit the hardest.



When the preliminary 2010-11 budget was passed in June each supervisorial district was allocated about \$225,000. In September, that was reduced to \$193,500.

It was Supervisor Jack Sweeney's idea last month for each of the five districts to have a pot of money instead of it being one pot for the whole board. From those individual pots the salaries of the supervisor (about \$75,000) and of the assistant (it varies), health benefits, retirement, phone, car, mileage, and other expenses are paid.

Norma Santiago, who represents the South Shore, is being hit the hardest. She is no longer being reimbursed for mileage or cell phone expenses. Her assistant, Judi McCallum, will work 36 hours a week.

Santiago drives to Placerville nearly every day from her home in South Lake Tahoe, thus incurring more gas bills than some of her colleagues. Tahoe also has a separate office, while the other four only work out of the county seat.

"I am not going to change my work schedule. I am very dedicated to this job," Santiago said, even though she will have less cash in her pocket.

Supervisor Ray Nutting has the largest swath of land to represent, so he, too, regularly fills his gas tank.

Supervisor John Knight and Santiago's assistants are at the top of the pay scale because of the length of time they've been with the county – a hit to their bottom line.

Another discrepancy in costs is which health plan a supervisor is on and how many dependents he/she has as well as what plan their assistant is on. For those in Placerville, Kaiser is an option. The Tahoe plan is more expensive.

With the change in allocations, Santiago and Nutting are hit the hardest, Knight is close to breaking even, and Supervisor Ron Briggs has offered his surplus to help Santiago and Nutting. Sweeney's excess of more than \$30,000 is in his account for now.

Sweeney and Briggs could not be reached for comment.

"I made the motion to cut our salaries," Nutting said.

That proposal will likely be before the board later this fall. It takes a change to the county charter to make that happen. Nutting would have preferred that to occur before the current financial structuring took place to keep things even.

Even if three votes could be obtained for a salary cut, in the case of Sweeney, he would still have a surplus. One reason he has fewer expenses is he's on Medicare and has no dependent children.

While Santiago supports the pay cut over the current scenario, she doesn't think the votes are there for it to pass.

Knight won't be the third vote.

"I think it's grandstanding," Knight said of Nutting's proposal. "I don't think he thought it out. I think it's political."

Knight said he has never taken a dime of reimbursement pay from the county for things like medical insurance, phone or mileage.

Nutting said it costs him about \$600 month in expenses to be a supervisor. No longer is he being reimbursed for his cell phone, though he says 99 percent of what he uses it for is county business.

“There is a lot of stuff going on that I don’t care for,” Nutting said in regards to the supervisors’ budgets. He agrees things need to be cut, but he doesn’t like the way it is happening.

With the added expenses, Santiago said it would be more like a 30 percent pay cut for her. She agrees the board needs to make cuts just like it is imposing on employees, but she believes it could be more fair.

“In the past there was one budget for the board. My proposal would be to look at the resources that are needed for each district, which would be a far more equitable way of doing this,” Santiago said.

The Board of Supervisors is having its annual Tahoe meeting this morning at 9 at Lake Tahoe Airport.