

Opinion: Sneaky behavior by EDC officials exposed

By Larry Weitzman

On June 2 the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors did the right thing and saved the county from a mini debacle that would have cost hundreds of thousands of dollars annually starting in about two weeks. Since the Board of Supervisors' agenda is prepared by the CAO's office at the direction of the chief administrative officer, the blame for this initially resides there. But more specifically, this particular agenda item originated in Human Resources, headed by current CAO Pamela Knorr.



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It was agenda item No. 13 and presented to the BOS as an innocuous clean-up of language in a resolution that would amend the salary and benefits resolution for unrepresented employees and replace a prior resolution from 2001, which was the first mistake. The resolution from 2003 should have been used as it amended the 2001 resolution. This June 2 resolution allegedly included basic changes to on-call duty compensation for HHSAs extra-help employees to be consistent with on-call duty compensation recommended in a letter of agreement with county employees' association, Local 1. While innocuous, it was important for HHSAs, especially when a call for client service or mental problems occurs at 1am.

When on the consent calendar on May 19, the resolution contained enough errors that the assessor and auditor asked that the matter be put over for two weeks. Also part of the county's process is that resolutions of salaries and benefits be posted to Legistar 21 days in advance of the calendar allowing sufficient time for scrutiny. The matter was re-calendared for June 2, but the matter didn't hit Legistar until May 29. Because it was late in the day on Friday, no one gave it a look until June 1, which turned out to be a busy day as it was the first day of budget hearings.

It was late Monday when someone saw what appeared to be an intentional attempt to seek massive raises for some department heads. Remember, the resolution's purpose was ostensibly to correct on-call extra help duty compensation, but the 44 pages of legalese and government-speak set for the June 2 calendar had a new four-line provision that was nowhere to be found in the May 19 resolution and those four lines provided that elected and appointed department heads would now receive longevity pay, not just for total service to El Dorado County, but for service to other city and county jurisdictions. How much? "Ten years gets 5 percent, 15 years gets 10 percent; 20 years gets 13 percent 25 years gets 15 percent and 30 years gets 16 percent."

The history of this provision needs review. On Dec. 11, 2001, a salary and benefits resolution was passed by the board that gave elected and appointed department heads longevity pay for service to other counties and cities. On July 15, 2003, Resolution 204-2003 eliminated that longevity pay provision.

In Knorr's apparent rush to finalize the 5.5 and 5 percent raises for most county employees, reduce the electeds' pay by eliminating longevity pay entirely (not just longevity pay for in-county or out-of-county service) and eliminate other differentials to elected department heads, the problem commenced. This measure was proposed by former District 4 Supervisor Ron Briggs and passed 3-1 in late 2013 with

supervisors Brian Veerkamp, Norma Santiago and Briggs voting yes, Supervisor Ray Nutting abstaining and Supervisor Ron Mikulaco voting no.

Then the Human Resources director, Knorr included modified language from the 2001 resolution instead of the more-current 2003 resolution and inadvertently (or intentionally?) included longevity pay for management for service to other cities and counties, striking the language that electeds can participate.

A recent Grand Jury report (Case 14-07) filed a few months ago criticized HR department's operations, noting 16 significant negative findings. Its operation is a failure. Guess who runs the HR Department? Knorr is still HR director and has been so for this entire fiasco starting before November 2013.

No one on the board expressed a need for longevity pay for service outside the county, especially now with county deficits in the tens of million dollars, but technically it's been part of the salary and benefits resolution since Nov. 18, 2013. And it's still causing a potential problem. While it wasn't included in this year's May 19 resolution, the mistake reappeared in the June 2 resolution.

Who would benefit? Knorr would benefit, according to her statements regarding working for other government agencies, by an immediate \$28,000 annual salary increase (15 percent) on top of her \$186,000 salary, not counting benefits. County Counsel Robyn Drivon, who has a base salary of about \$197,000, would receive almost \$30,000. Since this longevity provision dates from November 2013, it could benefit people like Terri Daly and Kim Kerr. There are others who would benefit, but I doubt they even knew about it. Since this provision emanated from Human Resources and the CAO, with a county counsel review, how did it get through? Is this more evidence that the Grand Jury is even more correct? HR is incompetent and who else?

This matter just wasn't on the board agenda; it was on the consent calendar where items are passed perfunctory without discussion. Information on the agenda described the funding source as: "Funding: Changes to on-call duty compensation affect the Health & Human Services Agency only and would be funded primarily from state and federal funds." Nothing could be further from the truth. It would have amounted to hundreds of thousands of dollars of General Fund spending and this was just one day after the CAO's budget wanted to cut more than \$500,000 of vital senior programs. The board didn't go along with that either.

On June 5, I received an unsolicited call from County Counsel Drivon, who tried to explain this "mistake." It was so confusing to the point that I asked her three simple questions: How did that happen? Who did it? How and why did it get by the county counsel's office? Drivon's response was a simple "good day" and a hang up. Maybe it wasn't such a good day.

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