

Calif. Senate raises employee pay 1 year after layoffs

By Don Thompson, AP

The California state Senate is giving all its employees pay raises just one year after laying off several dozen employees due to financial problems, according to a memo obtained by the Associated Press.

The raises for about 1,000 employees are possible because of last year's "prudent and necessary cuts," according to the memo to employees from Senate Secretary Daniel Alvarez.

They include a 4 percent cost-of-living increase for employees who are paid less than about \$150,000 a year. Those paid up to \$178,000 get 2 percent raises, while those paid more than that get 1 percent increases.

They are the first raises in nearly eight years, according to the memo, which is dated Dec. 21.

It does not project the total cost to taxpayers, and Senate officials declined to immediately provide that information. Officials told the AP to file a request under the Legislative Open Records Act for that and other details about the increases.

The Assembly is not giving across-the-board raises this year and hasn't since 2007, said spokesman John Casey.

However, Assembly members can give their employees merit raises if they have money in their individual office budgets and if the employee has not received a raise in at least two years. Members' annual budgets were increased to \$292,000 earlier this month, restoring them to their pre-recession level after they were cut by nearly \$30,000 six years ago.

Senate President Pro Tem Kevin de Leon, D-Los Angeles, announced a year ago that he was cutting 39 out of nearly 1,000 staff positions.

Alvarez said then that the layoffs were necessary due to a projected financial shortfall caused because the Senate declined annual budget increases during the recession without making any layoffs, and because of smaller budget increases under limits set by a voter-approved ballot measure. The announcement came a month after de Leon became the chamber's new leader and officials have not disclosed how much was saved through the layoffs.

There were no layoffs in the Assembly at that time.

Spokesmen for de Leon would not comment or provide additional details.

Alvarez's staff memo cites several legislative accomplishments this year and notes that most other branches of state government have had raises in the last eight years.

"We implemented painful but prudent and necessary cuts to put our own house in fiscal order and achieve greater efficiencies in our delivery of services," his memo says. "As a result, we can responsibly consider long-overdue cost-of-living adjustments."

The increases will be included in the paychecks employees receive Dec. 31.

The Senate also has spent \$1.17 million on 1,300 new desktop computers and monitors since October, according to a separate response to an inquiry by the AP.

The old computers "had reached their useful end-of-life and ... repairs were no longer feasible," Alvarez said in the written response.