

Supervisors want

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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'automatic' raises

No longer a 'part-time' job

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SANTA CRUZ — If an ordinance tentatively approved by the Board of Supervisors Tuesday receives final board approval next week, county supervisors will never again have to justify a pay increase to their constituents.

In fact, if the new ordinance goes unchallenged, supervisors will never even have to vote on a pay increase for themselves again.

The raises will just come automatically, courtesy of the state Legislature. But they'll still be paid out of the county treasury.

What supervisors did this week was to agree to tie their pay to the salaries of superior court judges, which are set by the state. The action came on a 3-2 vote at the end of a long agenda, and was preceded by virtually no discussion.

Supervisors Robley Levy, Dan Forbus and Joe Cucchiara provided the votes needed to pass the ordinance. Supervisors Chairman Gary Patton and Supervisor E. Wayne Moore Jr., both of whom are up for re-election next year, voted against it.

But neither of the latter two board members said much about the proposal, which was presented to the board by County Administrative Officer George Newell.

If the ordinance receives final approval Dec. 17, supervisors' pay will be set at 40 percent of superior court judges' salaries starting in February. Board members' pay will be increased to 45 percent of jurists' salaries starting June 14, 1986, under the ordinance. And because supervisors' salaries will be pegged to judges' pay, board members' pay

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Supervisors' pay raise

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will go up whenever the Legislature grants raises to the judges.

Superior court judges make \$77,000 annually.

Supervisors' salaries traditionally have been low because the post has been considered a part-time job. According to Newell, the "part-time concept is no longer consistent with the duties and obligations of (board) members."

Newell said it was time to "recognize" the extent of supervisors' current job responsibilities by "establishing a full-time rate of pay." The new pay formula is aimed at doing that.

Initially, the new formula means a \$2,664 annual raise for supervisors, who currently make \$28,188 a year. That's an increase of just under 9.5 percent.

Supervisors would get an additional \$3,798 a year when their pay goes to 45 percent of judges' salaries next June, bringing the board's total pay increase in the current fiscal year to just under 23 percent.

Supervisors were less generous earlier this year when they negotiated a new contract with the 1,240 county workers represented by the Service Employees International Union. The new SEIU contract gave county employees pay raises ranging from 5 to 18 percent, with the largest percentage increases going to workers on the low end of the county's pay scale. Those raises were spread over two years.

Ironically, this week's move to peg board compensation to judges' salaries came following a series of dire warnings by CAO Newell that the county is facing serious fiscal problems.

The CAO has repeatedly warned the board in recent weeks that the county's financial situation is becoming ever more precarious, as state support declines in the face of cost increases in state-mandated county programs.

As recently as two weeks ago, Newell advised supervisors that the county faced a \$500,000 to \$800,000 deficit in the current fiscal year. The

CAO said then that he hoped to stave off the threatening red ink through increased prior year tax collections — and salary savings.

Should supervisors go ahead with the plan to link their pay to judges' salaries, Santa Cruz County will become one of about a half-dozen counties in the state to insulate board members' salaries from local financial pressures by tying them to a pay scale set in Sacramento.

Alan Burdick, a spokesman for the County Supervisors Association of California, said Wednesday that the formula approach to supervisors' salaries is becoming increasingly popular.

"There's been a lot of discussion of this the last couple of years," Burdick said. "Supervisors' salaries keep falling farther and farther behind because it's so difficult (politically) to make any kind of adjustment."

"In some communities there's no sympathy whatsoever for increasing compensation for (supervisors)," Burdick said. "That's what's promoted it."

Burdick said the approach is not new. He noted that Los Angeles County has tied its supervisors' pay to 100 percent of superior court judges' salaries for a number of years now.

Monterey County supervisors voted over a year ago to set their pay at 50 percent of Municipal Court judges' salaries.

Municipal court judges are paid \$70,436 a year, and Monterey County supervisors are paid \$35,218 annually.

The Santa Cruz County pay-formula plan was defended by supervisors Levy and Forbus Wednesday.

Levy said it was "appropriate" to tie board pay to a percentage of judges' salaries because the supervisor's position has become a "full-time job."

"It's reasonable to tie it (supervisors' pay) to some kind of standard," she said. "It's a change from part-time compensation to full-time compensation."

"It's based on what Monterey

County did and what two or three other counties have done," Forbus said. "It makes it easier on us and takes it (the pay issue) out of our hands, basically."

"It's a better deal — then the board doesn't have to 'rassle' with it every year-and-a-half or two years."

"It's just a formula," said Forbus. "If the state goes down, we go down. If the state goes up, we go up a little."

Moore said today that he had voted against the pay raise because of the formula.

"I think the CAO is correct, that it (the supervisor's post) is a full-time job," he said, "but the nature of the increase, which changes the way supervisors get paid, required a bit more examination, and that's why I voted no."

Moore was asked why, if he thought the pay-formula plan needed "more examination," he didn't raise his concerns about the proposal during the board's discussion of the matter. "I often vote no without saying anything," he responded. "I didn't discuss it because the hour was late and it didn't seem to be appropriate at the time."

Moore said he hadn't yet decided whether to take the pay raise if it receives final approval.

"I haven't made up my mind yet," he said. "I am thinking of not taking it; there is a possibility."

If supervisors give final approval to the new pay-formula ordinance next week, the formula, and the board's first raise, will take effect in mid-February unless voters take matters into their own hands.

Under the state government code, voters could block the raises and overturn the ordinance through a popular referendum, provided enough voters signed petitions to qualify an initiative for the ballot.

Signatures in an amount equaling 10 percent of the total number of county voters to cast ballots for all candidates in the 1982 gubernatorial election would be needed to put the issue before the electorate.