

Taxpayer Group Says: Open Up Negotiations

The Sutter County Taxpayers Association has monitored Sutter County government entities for over 45 years and it has become very clear that negotiations between county/city management and employee unions, which are done in secret, have led to extremely generous salaries and benefits for local government employees – far above those in the private sector.

A recent example is Sutter County agreeing to establish a “wellness clinic” for its 970 county employees at a cost of \$600,000 a year. This is a clinic for county employees and their families for non-emergency health care with no co-pay and is in addition to taxpayers providing 80% of the employee health care insurance cost.

There are other examples such as the 35% increase in pension benefits which was passed on the consent calendar in 2004 and made retroactive without any public input. That action has cost we taxpayers millions of dollars. Sutter County, or rather we citizens, will owe over \$120 million to the California Public Employees Retirement System by the end of 2015.

For openness and transparency, SCTA strongly encourages the county and cities to adopt “COIN” which stands for Civic Openness in Negotiations. COIN was adopted by the City of Costa Mesa in 2012. More recently, Rancho Palos Verdes enacted their own version called “OPEN” (Open Public Employee Negotiations). Under COIN, proposals from both the employee organizations and county/city officials have to be presented during at least two meetings prior to the meeting when a vote is taken. This would give the citizens -- who are the bill payers -- a chance to study and comment on the proposals. As it is now, negotiations are done in secret and then an MOU is put on the agenda for adoption with little or no advance notice.

Had COIN been in effect during Sutter County employee negotiations last fall, we citizens could have commented on the Wellness Clinic issue and could possibly have stopped or redirected the expenditure of taxpayer dollars to needed positions such as an Internal Auditor, Sheriff’s deputies, etc.

It is the public’s right to have a say in how our tax dollars are being spent. We, therefore, encourage Sutter County and the cities of Yuba City and Live Oak to open up the employee negotiation process to transparency and public input. After all, it is our money paying the bills!!

Pat, Miller, President
Sutter County Taxpayers Association

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