

Memo

To: Board of Supervisors
From: Supervisor Jack Sweeney
Date: 5/12/2009
Re: Supervisor's Budget, Item 41 on 5/12/09



Our founding fathers felt that this great nation could be best run by legislators that were "citizen legislators"; not paid full time employees of the government. Our effort this year to work together as a policy board should result in our being less involved in the day to day business of the county. Our direction should stem from decisions about policy made in the board room , not as individuals. If we can follow these principles, we can spend less time at our jobs as Supervisors, reduce our pay and expenses, and return to our places in the community. That would help us be better informed about what our constituents want of us instead of what other governments or bureaucrats want. (So this is a dream; but it is as it should be.)

I believe that as the "citizen legislators" for this county we are subject to higher standards than are other employees of the county. We need to put in place rules that will be specific to members and their immediate staff (assistants) so that future Supervisors will know the rules when they take office.

My purpose in trying to bring our salaries, benefits and expenses under a budget that is the same for each district is to provide all of our constituents with equal representation. If a member can hire a more costly (and theoretically more effective) assistant that member would have an advantage over another member. Yet, under a uniform budget, a member may wish to have two employees. A member may wish to use some of their budget for special research. In any event, the member should decide how to manage the operation of their district as long they are within the same budget amount as is allocated for other members!

As a matter of history, the Board has always struggled with setting its compensation. The idea of expenses for Supervisors was when their salaries were mere stipends. These expenses were to fully compensate members for out of pocket expenses incurred as part of their job! They were never meant to be the method of testing to see what a member would attend or where or how they would travel. The test should not be that the county will pay for it but that a member would do the act out of their pocket.

The idea of assistants was to take workload from the members and from the Clerk's office, and to better serve our constituents. The rule is the assistants serve at our pleasure and they would change with each change of the members. In the mid 1990's the Board gave longevity, management leave, and other perks to the assistants thereby significantly increasing the amount any given assistant could earn. Perhaps it is time to re-evaluate how much we pay our assistants.

On the few occasions when we have an activity that should be reimbursed by the county, we should use our own funds and use a monthly billing to be reimbursed for such activities; we should not use a county credit card on a daily basis as it requires a series of expensive accounting procedures for each transaction. This becomes especially complicated when the charge made on the credit card is in excess of that allowed by the county policies. The billing mentioned above would be for mileage, meals, and other expenses that may be appropriately reimbursed.

It appears that it is appropriate for a member of the Board to be reimbursed for cell phone expenses; it does not seem that an assistant has a need for a county reimbursed cell phone. The member is subject to call on an emergency basis and needs to be kept abreast of activities in the county.

For many years I have listened to discussions on the use of county cars by members of the Board; these discussions have always led to statements of potential misuse or at least the appearance of the assignment of vehicles to individual supervisors as being an un-necessary benefit.

My hope is that this letter might prompt the preparation of policies and instructions so that future new supervisors will know how to proceed and that we can have the same budget amount for each district.

Thank you for your patience, Jack Sweeney