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Thursday, January 14, 2010 ADVERTISE | CONTACT US

Hemphill: Is a firefighter worth more than a submarine commander?

SHARE PRINT EMAIL

By Alan Hemphill
January 13, 2010

Rather than “burying the lead” let me put this as boldly as possible: The average firefighter in California makes more money than the commanding officer of a nuclear submarine.

There are 10,000 California “public employees” who have retired and are collecting pensions higher than a three- or four-star general.

Los Angeles City Councilman Bernard Parks has a \$178,789 annual salary. He also receives a \$265,000 annual retirement as the police chief, meaning that his annual income from the taxpayers is \$443,789. He subsequently received a 10 percent increase in his retirement! Parks, 65, has been outspoken about the need to get payroll and pension costs under control — gets \$265,000 a year in retirement payments in addition to his \$178,789 council salary.



The unions will tell you regarding firemen and policemen that “they put their lives on the line for you” — and it is true, but they do not rank in the top ten “dangerous jobs” as determined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

If you want to know why San Diego can’t fix the streets, why the water pipes rupture, why the city can’t afford a new City Hall — the reason is high public service salaries and pensions. Bernardo Center Drive west of the freeway is a metaphor for San Diego’s woes.

When Vallejo finally had to admit defeat and declare bankruptcy, 75 percent of the budget was police and fire. When that city finally went belly-up, 21 firefighters were making more than \$200,000 a year. Seventy-seven of the firefighters made more than \$170,000 a year. (There were 190 firefighters in Vallejo — which is approximately the same size as Escondido.)

The average cost, salary and benefits of a firefighter in Orange County is \$175,000 a year. Former Orange County Sheriff Mike Carona, currently in federal jail on corruption charges, is collecting \$207,979 a year in retirement. (One of Carona’s assistant sheriffs just retired on \$223,000!)

Government retirement benefits are so outrageous as to cause real alarm — like the retired police chief of San Francisco (Heather Fong, age 53) who collects \$229,500 a year (plus full medical) for life!

Or the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power General Manager Ron Deaton, who will collect \$327,000 a year for life — plus full medical benefits. An assistant general manager with the same department retired on \$290,000 a year.

This is the “Pay and Pension Plan That Ate California” — pure and simple, and in the next few years the problem will become even more obvious as cities, counties and the state itself raise taxes, cut services and lay off more people. There is no choice — other than bankruptcy — because the contracts are written in stone and the unions will not “give back.”

The problem, of course, is not police and fire unions — they simply do what unions do, they demand “more.” The problem was that the unions had negotiators on both sides of the table — the union represents the union, and the politicians are beholden to the union for their election.

No one represents the taxpayer.

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Richard wrote at 8:48 am on January 14, 2010:

I have observed that Poway's newest Councilman, Jim Cunningham seems to be more concerned about protecting the unions than he does in representing the city and residents. His "day job" is a union representative for police and firemen in Riverside County.

Many of Mr. Cunningham's comments and actions have shown that Poway should be conceredned that "the unions have negotiators on both sides of table" here too...

Richard

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