



San Joaquin Taxpayers Association

SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY MOSQUITO & VECTOR CONTROL DISTRICT TRUSTEE COMPENSATION

(Revised July 17, 2013)

In May, 2012, the San Joaquin Taxpayer's Association (SJTA) questioned what appeared to be conflicting information regarding the amount of compensation that is advertised to the public (per-meeting stipend) and what is actually being provided to some trustees (health insurance benefits) of the SJC Mosquito Abatement & Vector Control District.

On May 14, 2012, we sent a letter of request to the District asking for related information on this matter. We received our requests, including specifics of the statutory authority the district relies on to receive compensation.

We found that the Mosquito District Board had taken action on July 21, 2009 to approve benefits for themselves. Of the 11 trustees, 4 participate in the medical plan, 5 participate in the dental plan, and 5 participate in the vision plan.

To determine a comparison of compensation county-wide, we asked San Joaquin County staff for a list of all county boards, commissions and districts. We received fact sheets summarizing the compensation and membership qualifications of all 61 boards, commissions and committees with fact sheets for each one on the county website; representing at least 529 member positions. 47 boards offer no compensation and 14 of them only offer compensation of \$25 to \$100 per meeting plus mileage/travel expense.

The County Attorney's office verified that they are not aware of any discrepancies between the amounts of advertised compensation and the actual compensation received by individuals appointed to the various boards.

The SJC Mosquito Abatement & Vector Control District Board is listed with the other sixty boards on the county web site. This board is comprised of eleven members and trustees meet on the 3rd Tuesday of each month. Each trustee is to receive a stipend of \$100 per meeting. District payment schedules show that, from January 2007 to June 2012, the board has indeed only met once a month.

Yet, as a result of the District Board's action on July 21, 2009, trustees can receive health plan benefits for themselves and dependents in addition to their monthly-meeting compensation. During the period of Aug. 1, 2009 to June 1, 2012, the district has paid five trustees a total of \$112,086.78 for health plans (four of which includes a spouse or children), plus the monthly-meeting compensation.

On Nov. 20, 2012, the district board reacted to the SJTA report by appointing an ad-hoc committee (Groen, Lucchesi, Eley) tasked with bringing to the Board, a recommendation for a course of action on health benefits after committee review of the underlying principles, costs and impact to the district.

On Jan. 3, 2013, the SJTA asked the SJC Board of Supervisors to postpone (3) appointments to the Mosquito Abatement Board until the district trustees have completed the deliberations they initiated in November. However, on Jan. 8, 2013, San Joaquin County Supervisors approved three appointments to the Mosquito District Board without comment.

On Jan. 15, 2013, The SJC Mosquito Abatement District Board reviewed the current trustee benefits plan. Of importance is that deliberations, conclusions and recommendations by the Nov. 20 ad-hoc committee were not subsequently declared and its purpose was never discussed in public forum. Additionally, there were differences of opinion among the trustees during the Nov. 20 Board meeting concerning health benefits. The Lodi News-Sentinel commented that, "the board had an animated discussion in 2009... and they don't seem to be in agreement now'.

Yet, at this meeting President Marc Warmerdam began the relevant discussion by saying, "I believe the board has reached a consensus to continue health benefits for trustees". Since deliberations had not been made in open session from Nov. 20 to Jan. 15, it is unclear how a 'collective decision' (Gov. Code section 54952.6) was made prior to today's unanimous affirmative vote.

The following comments from concerned citizens illustrate public reaction to our findings:

- Mosquito District employees' point of view; that trustees are receiving benefits generally reserved for full-time employees
- The county unemployment rate is quite high
- County bargaining groups have made serious concessions on health benefits
- Many city and county officials have tapped reserves and funds for capital projects
- County staff has been reduced for services like criminal prosecution
- There has been a reduction or elimination of earned health insurance benefits once enjoyed by municipal employees and/or retirees

On June 29, 2013, the San Joaquin Taxpayers Association sent out a formal request the County Board of Supervisors and City Councils to weigh in with an opinion and/or course of action. Trustees are appointed by county supervisors and city council members.

On July 16, 2013 the Trustees met to discuss parallel concerns of the SJTA and the SJC Grand Jury; namely, the misuse of taxpayer money in providing health benefits to trustees and their families. At this regular board meeting, the District's attorney advised the board to revisit the issue due to the public interest, particularly by the grand jury and the San Joaquin Taxpayers Association, about the health insurance issue.

The SJTA has reached out to all California counties and we have received information on appointees and costs relating to their boards and commissions.

The Association has visited a State Assembly Member who is willing to introduce a bill to remove legislative provisions that currently allow non-elected board members to receive health and welfare benefits.

SUMMARY

This is a classic example of 'Community Service' turned 'Self Service'.

Public service is an opportunity to put our time, knowledge and talents to use for the betterment of a community. County Supervisors appoint more than 500 citizens in this county to 61 boards and commissions; city council members – even more. With the exception of a handful of trustees on the Mosquito Abatement District Board, there are scores of civic-minded men and women in San Joaquin County who are truly dedicated to public service who first ask themselves, "What course of action will best promote the public trust in my leadership?"

The authority upon which trustees may approve health benefits for themselves is found in the Health and Safety Code 2050 and Government Code 53200, but it is unconscionable for taxpayers to be expected to bear the cost of full health insurance benefits for non-elected, appointed individuals.

Inherent in these appointments is the opportunity to look for personal gain with few checks and balances. These positions have always been described rhetorically as public service. However, they have evolved into fairly lucrative jobs with substantial benefits that should be reserved for full-time workers.

A revision to the current state legislation is needed that would more fairly represent the electorate through the democratic process. In the meantime, we are hopeful that our local elected officials will intervene on behalf of the electorate and taxpayers.



Media reporting:

- **Taxpayer Watchdog Questions Mosquito Board's Benefits:**
The compensation from the benefits was not listed on a fact sheet posted on the San Joaquin County government website. The Record July 19, 2012
- **Trustees Agree To Reconsider Their 2009 Vote On Health Benefits:**
The board will meet this afternoon to discuss whether they want to increase benefits, reduce them or eliminate them altogether. Lodi News-Sentinel Nov. 20, 2012
- **The San Joaquin County Mosquito Board Postpones Decision On Trustee Health Benefits:**
The board had an animated discussion in 2009 when trustees voted to allow themselves to have health benefits and they don't seem to be in agreement now. Lodi News-Sentinel Nov. 21, 2012
- **Postponement Requested By The SJTA On Mosquito Board Appointments:**
Lodi News-Sentinel Jan. 6, 2013
- **County Supervisors Made Board Appointments:**
Despite a plea by the SJTA for postponement until the trustees finished deliberation about health benefits received by trustees. The Record Jan. 9, 2013
- **After Further Review, S.J. Pest Control Board to Keep Health Benefits:**
The vote to maintain the benefit for the trustees was unanimous, according to the district. The Record Jan. 21, 2013
- **Bug Boards' Benefits over the Top:**
The SJTA questioned why appointed board members of a mosquito board should even have their health care covered by the taxpayers. Coverage for workers is one thing. Coverage for part-time appointees is another. The Record Jan. 23, 2013
- **Gravy Train Spotting:**
The reason we are aware of this is the San Joaquin County Taxpayer's Association. We should be glad the Taxpayer's Association is out there. The Record's Metro Columnist Jan. 23, 2013
- **Mosquito Control Board Criticized By SJTA and Grand Jury:**
News 10 TV May 28, 2013
- **San Joaquin Taxpayers Association president: 'We want to be seen as truly nonpartisan':**
We will ask the state Legislature to ban appointed county committees from voting themselves health insurance benefits. Lodi News-Sentinel June 29, 2013
- **San Joaquin County Mosquito and Vector Control District board responds to Grand Jury:**
The District attorney advised the board to revisit the issue due to the public interest, particularly by the grand jury and the San Joaquin Taxpayers Association, about the health insurance issue. Lodi News-Sentinel July 17, 2013