

City pay, benefits can come down

BY CAROL GILBERT

GUEST OPINION

There is a general mistake made by many people who work that salaries and benefits only go one direction — up.

That is a false belief, and in fact as economics change, so must the foregoing. On a national, state, county and city level, when the economy was robust, up was the only direction they took.

Now that the economy has tanked, these government agencies are racking up huge deficits based on the generosity of our officials.

Let me make clear that the union leaders did what they are supposed to do and went for the most they could provide their membership. And, elected officials acted to ensure their reelection and were often too generous to those bodies who supported their candidacy.

The expectations for public salaries and benefits are completely out of sync with what we taxpayers see in the world of business. Council and unions,

please work together to correct these inequities.

- **Determine why overtime is so high.**

We have employees who make as much in overtime as many people would be happy to make in regular salary. Exempt employees normally do not even get overtime pay. Do we need additional emergency employees to cover the shortfall, or would that cost the city more?

- **Terminate payout for accrued sick time.**

Employees, please appreciate the fact that you have ample time available lest something catastrophic happen to you. That's what it is for; it's not meant to be another source of income. Private businesses simply delete it at retirement.

Note: Retired Fire Chief Nick Marinaro indicated that he saved up

2,071 hours of sick leave because, "When I got sick I came to work."

Well, you shouldn't have. That does not mean that it is there for "mental health" days, but what is the point of coming in sick and spreading the illness to everyone else?

- **Vacation time is pay you do have a right to.**

Typically it is limited to a 2-3 year backlog, and then you must take it in time off or cash.

It should have nothing to do with final determination of a pension. Some places even have a use-it-or-lose-it policy. Vacation time is in place to renew your energy during your working years, not to provide you with a cushy retirement.

- **Pensions are history in the private sector and should be phased out of the public sector.**

Let employees participate in self-funded 401(k) accounts. A minimal match is all that corporate employees

get nowadays, not the average \$11,259 the city of Palo Alto contributes for each employee per year compared to the \$1,374 employee contribution per year. These figures are completely inverted. Normal workers who can contribute, do so, and employer matching is disappearing fast.

- **Palo Alto city employees get more paid holidays per year than businesses do, though their 12 versus 10 days won't break the bank.**

We do have good employees and representatives, but it is time to hold everyone's feet to the fire.

We are overly generous with not only our unionized employees but also with the perks we get told we must pay to hire the best at administrative levels.

Council, what goes up can go down.

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