

Hello, this is Tom Cookman with a Community Comment

Here we are at the end of another year; a year in which Humboldt County had sixteen homicides that we know about. This is the highest number ever recorded. I find it interesting that our elected officials are quoted in the media saying this murder problem is a direct result of their departments being under-funded. It is true that the police departments do not have enough money to hire new officers. The department heads approve the request to hire new officers, and when it comes time to actually fill the position, there isn't enough money to fund the job. Then we are told that the solution to this problem is to raise taxes. That is always the approach our elected officials take: raise taxes. The Humboldt County Sheriff's Department has several officers they haven't been able to hire because of a perceived lack of funds. When asked why these positions remain vacant, Mike Downey said that "his budget has stayed pretty constant at \$28 to \$29.5 million, but operating costs have gone through the roof. Those costs include skyrocketing retirement expenses, union contracts and insurance". These expenses are employee compensation. We have a serious problem, that I've mentioned before, that isn't being addressed: our government employees are overpaid with benefit packages that dwarf the benefits those of us in the private sector get. These packages are spearheaded by the unions. Instead of doing the fiscally responsible thing and telling the unions, "NO", the government solution is always to raise taxes, which will only temporarily help the problem. In the next election, we will be told that more money is needed for police, fire and schools. However, the real fix is to cut the outlandish benefits we pay our government workers. Instead of one police officer making \$210,000 per year, I suggest that we pay two officers \$105,000 or better yet, three officers \$70,000

per year. I ask the Board of Supervisors to tell the unions that enough is enough, and that we must cut salaries and benefits to the employees or we will go bankrupt. Unfortunately, foxes are watching the hen house. It wasn't too long ago our Supervisors were making \$30,000 per year. Then they voted themselves pay raise after pay raise. Their compensation package went to \$40,000, then \$50,000, then 60, 70, 80, 90, 100 and now it is almost \$110,000 per year. It is comical, and disgusting, to hear them publicly tell us they didn't take their last pay increase. We elect fiscally responsible candidates who jump in with both feet and the next thing we know, they are a tax and spend government employee just like the rest of them. Even though the Supervisor's position isn't affiliated with any political party, one of our Supervisors changed from the Republican Party to the Democrat Party. I wonder how long it will be before all five are registered Democrats. It is a fact that being a Democrat gets you more money from the unions - the same unions that are behind the outrageous salaries and benefit packages these government workers are being paid. Yes, our Sheriff's Department and several departments are understaffed, but they are not underfunded: they are simply overpaying their employees, who are actually our employees. I have two brothers in the Army. They have spent seven years between them away from their families in Iraq and Afghanistan facing unthinkable dangers and harsh conditions and they are paid a third of what some of our local police officers are paid. It's time to cut wages instead of raising taxes.

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