

November 14, 2018, Meeting Minutes
Hilton Garden Inn, 9015 West Highway 2, Spokane

The meeting of the Washington Citizens' Commission on Salaries for Elected Officials was brought to order by Chair, Melissa O'Neill Albert, at 6:00 p.m.

Commission Members Present:

Melissa O'Neill Albert, Chair
Jon Bridge
Greg Dallaire, Vice Chair
Libby Hart – Phoned in
Sandi LaPalm
Andrew Malidore
Linda Peterson – Phoned in
Anastasia Potapova
Gary Ratterree

Don Robinson
Kozen Sampson
LeAnna Chauvin
Gerry Sherman
Steven Starkovich – Phoned in
Larry Turner
Karen White

Staff Present:

Teri Wright, Executive Director
Lindsay Matthews, Executive Assistant

Melissa read the meeting opening statement.

Lindsay went over the meeting folder contents.

Public Testimony

After reading the procedure for public testimony, Melissa welcomed Tim Eyman who had signed up for public testimony. Mr. Eyman asked the Commissioners to consider raises from the perspective of the taxpayers. Do taxpayers believe raises are deserved or warranted? He said he would gather signatures to file a referendum opposing any salary increase the Commission enacts. He said when they took the job, they knew the salary. He believes that no elected official deserves a raise.

Melissa welcomed the next speaker Mike Fagan. Mr. Fagan said he has a unique perspective because he helped create the Spokane City Salary Review Commission. He hopes that all the testimonies will be taken to heart by the Commissioners when making the final salary decisions.

The next speaker was Jack Fagan who believes people volunteer to work in public service. He indicated support for the filing of a referendum to any increases the Commission passes. He said the State is in bad shape financially and thinks the performance of the elected officials doesn't warrant a salary increase.

There being no other requests to speak, the Commissioners moved into a work session. Teri explained the Legislative leadership stipend. She asked the Commissioners to read the comments received from the public so far about the proposed salary schedule. She then went over public disclosure; Commissioner e-mails are publically discloseable. She welcomed Commissioners to forward emails from the public to her for reply to make sure the public disclosure deadline is met as well as public disclosure timelines are followed.

The edited October meeting minutes were presented to the Commissioners by Lindsay.

Jon moved to approve the meeting minutes with revisions. Karen seconded.

The motion was approved by a unanimous voice vote.

Teri distributed a proposed salary schedule with the total percentage of salary increase for both 2019 and 2020, including the cost of living adjustment (COLA). After review, the Commissioners requested that each salary listed be broken into annual segments with COLA and increases for expanded scope of work be separated.

Following up on Tim Eyman's earlier statement, Teri handed out information from the Secretary of State's office outlining the initiative and referendum process in Washington State. She asked the Commissioners to read the handout, then asked for any questions. There were none.

Melissa welcomed Superior Court Judge Michael Price who had signed up to speak. Judge Price thanked the Commissioners for their work saying he was not there to talk about the issues, but only to express thanks. He offered that, in some respects, his job is like the Commissioners who must make decisions which are sometimes popular and sometimes not.

Melissa mentioned that she saw many uncontested judicial races. She also asked about the challenges of attracting new Judges to the bench. Judge Price replied that it is becoming hard to attract new members to the bench, especially in King, Pierce, and Snohomish Counties where the cost of living is higher, because attorneys make much more in the private sector. He acknowledged that the state can't compete with the private sector pay, but indicated that the proposed salary schedule is a step in the right direction.

Jon added that there was only one contested position in the Supreme Court races this year.

Melissa welcomed District Court Judge Jennifer Fassbender who accompanied Judge Price to the meeting. Judge Fassbender spoke about her work as a part-time appointed municipal court Judge, as well a criminal defense attorney in private practice before she became an elected county district court Judge. She was aware she can make more the private sector, but it is her calling to work in the public sector. She believes the proposed salary schedule will give a better opportunity to recruit the best individuals to the bench from both the private and public sectors.

Pat McCarthy, State Auditor

Thanked the Commission for the opportunity to present at this meeting since she was out of the country during the last meeting. She provided a brief history of the State Auditor's Office (SAO). Ms. McCarthy noted the difference of SAO in Washington State compared to other jurisdictions nationally. In Washington State, the SAO is responsible for auditing 2,262 local government entities as well as all the state agencies. The SAO also conducts accountability, financial and performance audits. Further, it investigates whistleblower allegations, fraud and concerns of citizens. The office publishes approximately 2,000 audits per year. Four hundred staff members record their work on billable hours; then they bill the audited agencies, etc. Ms. McCarthy said cyber security audits are a quickly growing and ever expanding part of the State Auditors work. The SAO also must meet the requirement that Community and Technical colleges need a standalone financial statement audit for accreditation. The SAO now audits 34 community and technical colleges each year, and they were able to meet that new need with no additional staff.

Ms. McCarthy contended that the salary of the position should reflect the level of responsibility to the public. She believes the scope of work, managerial responsibilities and number of staff merit consideration of a salary increase at least equal to other state elected officials who manage other large agencies. She distributed sample information from the new financial intelligence tool (FIT) that the SAO is developing. It is an online tool allowing users to access financial information. Finally, she said the McCleary decision has huge implications for the SAO. They are currently working on clarity about the effects of the decision with other departments.

Jon pointed out that cyber security is a growing issue of importance and that it does seem to show an expanded scope of work for the SAO. Gary asked when cyber security was added to the SAO. Ms. McCarthy replied that her predecessor introduced cyber security to the SAO. Commissioners discussed the expanded scope of work of the SAO. Melissa asked if the staff at the SAO has grown, Ms. McCarthy replied that it has, there are over 400 staff persons currently.

Steve shared his perspective that although a job description may not have changed, responsibilities have increased enormously over time as all of state government has become much more complex. So the question is when and how much has it changed? That includes supervising more staff and particularly new staff of a technical nature.

Anastasia asked if Ms. McCarthy has had to hire staff at a higher wage than she makes herself. Ms. McCarthy replied yes.

It was explained again that performance is not one of the criteria considered when the Commission determines salaries. Job description, duties, and responsibilities as well as expanded scope of work are among the things the Commission considers.

Teri mentioned that after his presentation, she thanked Mike Fagan for his work on the Spokane City Salary Review Commission. They are modeled after our Commission. The more local salary commissions there are, that are modeled after our Commission, the easier it will be for people to observe and understand the Commission's decision-making process.

Anastasia brought up that the salaries were frozen for several years and if you showed inflation during those years in the Commission's draft schedule; you would see that proposed salaries have just been keeping up with inflation. Coupled with expanded roles and responsibilities, the draft schedule seems appropriate.

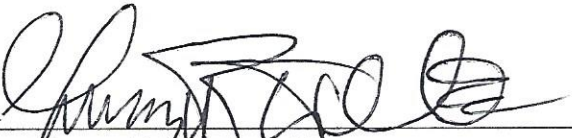
Responding to an issue raised by Tim Eyman, Greg said when you hire someone or someone is a new hire, you know the salary but you do not expect to stay at that salary forever. Everyone expects that they will eventually get a raise. It is not reasonable or fair to assume that because you are elected into office your salary will remain static.

Steve mentioned it might be beneficial if the Commissioners could see what the annual inflation rate was since the freeze in 2008, just to get an idea if the salaries did catch back up after the freeze was lifted.

Teri told Commissioners what to do if they are being harassed. She stressed that Commissioners do not have to put up with harassment or someone being disrespectful to them.

Greg moved to adjourn at 7:49 p.m., Kozen seconded.

The vote was unanimous and the meeting adjourned at 7:49 p.m.



Gregory Dallaire, Vice-Chair

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Date