

Pay Raise Splits Oakland Board

By JACKIE KLEIN
PONTIAC
Assistant prosecutors in Oakland County will get a 13.6 per cent average pay hike despite attempts by Republican county commissioners to squelch the proposed salary package.

Voting along strict party lines Thursday, the board of commissioners approved the pay package, retroactive to Jan. 1, by a 10-7 margin.

Voting for the proposal were Southfield Democrats Lawrence Pernick and Alex Perinoff and Berkeley Democrat Walter Paholak. Voting against it were Republicans Christian Powell,

Union Lake, and Robert Patnales, Royal Oak. Absent was Delos Hamlin of Farmington.

THE RAISES, still to be approved by the federal wage board, will cost the county an estimated \$4,700. Beginning salary for an assistant prosecutor will go from \$11,025 annually to \$12,000.

Paul Kasper (R-Bloomfield Hills), vice chairman of the personnel practices committee and an attorney, criticized the pay raise, negotiated between Oakland Prosecutor Thomas Plunkett, the county and Oakland County Government Bar Association, representing assistant prosecutors, as being against federal guidelines.

"I'm gasping my last breath of opposition to inflation in government spending," he said Thursday. "The prosecutor's office has received an 83 per cent salary increase since 1969. Taxpayers are required to stick to the 5.5 per cent federal guidelines, so why single out prosecuting attorneys for an average 10.6 per cent raise?"

"We don't have to pay prosecutors more money to keep them here. The county prosecutor's office is a training ground for attorneys, and they will always leave to become independent professionals," Kasper said.

Kasper said dispositions without trial have increased 158 per cent since 1969, and many cases are being settled, not tried.

He asserted that the federal wage board would call the package "way out of line."

"Plunkett is a Democrat and the Democrats on this board are protecting their own," he said. "But this should not be a consideration or an excuse for throwing out guideline controls."

Kasper said no law firm would pay between \$12,000 and \$16,000 for men just out of law school.

WILLIAM MAINLAND (D-Milford), chairman of the personnel practices committee, maintained the prosecutor's staff was in line for an increase to establish equity with other county employees.

He said other employees were in the upper one-third in terms of compensation compared with the average and the prosecutor's staff was at the "bottom of the totem pole." Even with the increase, he noted, prosecutor's pay would still be below the average.

"We must curb crime as well as inflation," he said. "Law abiding citizens, as well as the prosecutor's staff, have been short-changed. The county cannot provide prosecutors with capabilities necessary to compete. We must give the prosecutor's staff the muscle to fight the enemy we're up against."

Wallace Gabler (R-Royal Oak) said he would not go for the increase without built-in reforms. He suggested taking steps to eliminate outside practice of prosecutors, providing tenure to assure attorneys of their jobs when there is a change in prosecuting attorneys, and a general upgrading of the entire department.

He said many police departments were "extremely disturbed" about the prosecutors' practice of "copping out" by settling cases instead of trying them.

Powell proposed an amendment for the probationary attorneys' staff on a 10 per cent pay scale for six months until review. He also suggested an "attorney trainee," to be paid 20 per cent under his job classification with five per cent quarterly increases. The amendment failed.

Lew Coy (R-Wixom) said he would have gone for a preferential treatment if the prosecutor's office had not joined a bargaining unit, not under the county's umbrella.

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