

Press Reports and Audits on Governmental Waste, Fraud and Mismanagement

Compiled by the California Taxpayers' Association

Fire Prevention

Flying Fast

Dollar Amount: \$7,000,000

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection was raked through the coals in an August 31 Dan Walters column (Sacramento Bee). One element of Governor Gray Davis' "fire action plan" appears to be a boondoggle engineered by the second-ranking (department) official to obtain a very expensive, very fast, executive-style aircraft that he often flies personally and – according to those familiar with it – is unsuited to any serious firefighting role," the columnist wrote. The supercharged aircraft, with a top speed of more than 300 miles per hour, is known as "Woody's plane" because it is often flown by Chief Deputy Director Elwood "Woody" Allshouse, Mr. Walters continued. Mr. Allshouse came to the Davis administration from the CDF firefighters' union, of which he was president. The union was an early supporter of the governor's election campaign. Citing department sources, the column says the plane costs the state \$600,000 a year in lease payments, plus maintenance and operational expenses. The 12-year lease alone could cost the state more than \$7 million. Department Director Andrea Tuttle, a former environmental consultant, advocated the plane's acquisition but, according to Mr. Walters, confessed ignorance about the technical details. She defended it as necessary for infrared imaging, although it was reported that this is available on other slower, more suitable aircraft and the technology itself is considered outdated. Checking the plane's log, Mr. Walters noted that Mr. Allshouse was at the controls on eight of 12 flights since the state got the plane in mid-July, and only one of those flights, August 20 to the San Joaquin Valley, mentioned "fires" as the mission. (2001)

Region: Statewide

Jurisdiction: State

Source: Sacramento Bee - Aug. 31, 2001

L.A. Fire Department: Public Protection Agency or Animal House?

Dollar Amount:

The City Council reversed an 11-1 vote to give \$2.7 million of taxpayer money to Los Angeles fireman Tennie Pierce, who filed a racial discrimination suit after colleagues at the fire station put dog food in his spaghetti dinner. Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa vetoed the award after a Los Angeles radio show aired criticism and photos emerged showing Mr. Pierce participating in other crude firehouse pranks. Only six of the 15 council members voted to override the veto, prompting a renewal of settlement talks in an effort to head off a Superior Court trial. The council's three members who are black, as is Mr. Pierce, voted to grant the \$2.7 million. One of them, former police chief Bernard Parks, said the case could wind up costing taxpayers "significant dollars" in excess of \$2.7 million. In any event, one columnist noted that this may be the most expensive can of dog food ever bought by anyone, anywhere. Mr. Pierce, who is on administrative leave, referred to himself as "big dog" in a firehouse volleyball game, urging teammates to feed him the ball so he could spike it over the net. That night, two years ago, the dog food was mixed into the 6-foot-5 firefighters' dinner. Two fire captains who are white and a Latino firefighter were disciplined over the incident. (Caltaxletter: 12/1/06 from Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles Daily News, 11/30/06.)

Region: So. California

Jurisdiction: City

Source: LA Times, LA Daily News - Nov. 30, 2006

Mega-Pensions for Fire Chiefs

Dollar Amount:

Up to 20 supervisors have retired since January from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Prevention with pensions of up to about 115 percent of their salaries. However, the Schwarzenegger administration changed course and decided to prevent the supervisor retirees from cashing in on dual pensions, likely limiting them to 90 percent of final pay in their retirement checks. The retirement spree was caused by a loophole in labor contracts negotiated with former Governor Gray Davis' administration. Caltaxletter: 4/28/06 from Oakland Tribune, 4/20 and 4/26/06 and San Diego Union-Tribune, 4/26/06.)

Region: Statewide

Jurisdiction: County

Source: SD Union-Tribune - Apr. 26, 2006

LA Fire Overtime

Dollar Amount:

Overtime pay has made Fire Department employees among the highest-paid public employees in Los Angeles, with 15 of them making more than the mayor's \$179,700-a-year salary, the Los Angeles Times reported October 25. Fifty-six of the top 100 in pay are with the Fire Department, topped by one who had \$137,775 in overtime added to base pay of \$86,718, for a total of \$224,493. According to The Times, some city officials expressed concern and suggested that overtime be spread out more evenly among department employees. A key question is whether the city has enough firefighters. The department is understaffed, not overpaid, said Patrick McOsker of the firefighters' union.

Region: So. California

Jurisdiction: City

Source: LA Times - Oct. 25, 2004

Firefighters Overtime Plagues District

Dollar Amount:

Enticed by richer pensions, so many older firefighters retired last summer that the Contra Costa Fire District overspent its overtime budget and had trouble staffing its 30 stations, the Contra Costa Times reported January 30, 2003. With annual pensions going up as much as \$20,000, more than 10 percent of the firefighting force retired, and the district was unable to recruit enough replacements to ward off a wave of overtime costs.

Region: Bay Area

Jurisdiction: County

Source: Contra Costa Times - Jan. 30, 2003

Fire District Directors Compensation Works Out to \$849 Per Hour

Dollar Amount:

Members of the Liberty Fire District (northeast of Lodi) board meet for an average of 35 minutes a month and get a \$500-a-month stipend for health insurance premiums. This works out to \$849.06 per hour. Director Bill Ward said board members "deserve" the benefit. One member, Ted Leventini, does not accept it. District resident Bill Brown of Acampo said, "I don't think anyone who runs for public office should get paid for these little things. If he doesn't want to do it out of the goodness of his heart, then step aside and let someone who does." (Stockton Record, January 17, 2005.)

Region: C. Valley

Jurisdiction: City

Source: Stockton Record - Jan. 17, 2005
