

Press Reports and Audits on Governmental Waste, Fraud and Mismanagement

Compiled by the California Taxpayers' Association

Public Employment

Report: \$2 Billion Annual LA County Loss to Fraud, Abuse

Dollar Amount: \$2,000,000,000

Fraud and abuse by Los Angeles County employees and recipients of county services may be costing taxpayers nearly \$2 billion a year, reported the Los Angeles Daily News (January 8). The newspaper said exact figures don't exist, but last summer the county Grand Jury estimated welfare recipients are stealing \$500 million a year, and prosecutors have estimated fraud in food stamp, in-home health care and health care programs are costing taxpayers more than \$200 million. The national Association of Certified Fraud Examiners believes 5 percent of all business and government agency revenues are lost to employee fraud, waste and abuse each year. That would mean \$1 billion in losses, at least, from L.A. County's \$21 billion budget. It also is noted that investigations of L.A. County employee fraud have increased from 340 in 2000 to 583 in 2005, along with more calls to a county fraud hotline, up from 621 in 2003-04 to a projected 1,000 this fiscal year. James Cosper, who leads the District Attorney's Office Welfare Fraud Division: "It's as though in all the public assistance programs – be it welfare, food stamps, child care or Section 8 housing – someone put a pot of gold in the middle of the street and walked away from it with very little integrity controls. It's bad throughout the entire county. ... we do two or three major sweeps a year where we go out and arrest people. In case after case, they are driving Beemers, Lexus and Mercedes automobiles, or we have evidence they are taking expensive vacations, going on very nice cruises or living in expensive homes." (Source: Los Angeles Daily News, January 6, 2007.)

Region: So. California

Jurisdiction: County

Source: LA Daily News - Jan. 6, 2007

Overtime: Are there Abuses?

Dollar Amount: \$100,000,000

According to an internal audit of the 8,985-employee Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, more than \$100 million in overtime was paid in the eleven months through February 2006. Auditors found that about 14 percent of those charging for overtime took an absence for the same day. Thirty-two people reported overtime on the same date as absences more than 10 times each. DWP employees can get time and a half when working outside their normal work schedule. This allows an employee who takes time off in the morning to work in the afternoon and beyond the normal 5 p.m. quitting time, then charging for overtime. If an employee takes a Friday off and works Saturday, the Saturday time is at the overtime rate. DWP President David Nahai commented: "We can't do in this department without overtime. It's very corrosive to have some workers who commit fraud in the system while other workers are being honest." He wants to "delve into the issue to determine if there is widespread abuse and then come up with a discipline system." (Source: Los Angeles Daily News, February 20.) Meanwhile, in San Francisco, a security sergeant at San Francisco General Hospital, who is attached to the Sheriff's Department, made \$121,937 in overtime pay last year, getting \$63.31 an hour. Added to his \$78,128 base salary, Eric Cranston's total earnings for 2006 amounted to \$220,251. That's \$25,000 more than his boss, Sheriff Mike Hennessey, who doesn't get overtime. To make that much in overtime, Sergeant Cranston had to work about 7.5 hours of overtime every day of the workweek for 52 weeks in the year, reported columnists Phillip Matier and Andrew Ross of the San Francisco Chronicle. Actually, the sergeant, who said he didn't have time to talk because he was "on duty" when contacted by the columnists, put in more overtime hours in other years. A spokesperson for Sheriff Hennessey said supervisor-verified time sheets showed the sergeant had worked every hour, and the sheriff said that had any employee been signing in and not working, a whistle-blower would have called. Staff shortages in the department require filling of about 100 shifts a day with overtime, voluntary or mandatory, and as long as the daily total does not exceed 16 hours, it is within city rules. However, rules effective last July prevented Sergeant Cranston from filling in for officers of lesser rank, which is what he'd done in the past. That caused a reduction in his hours last year, but not enough to knock him from the top ranks. Still, he isn't the leader. Deputy Sheriff Antonio Santiago was paid for 2,266 hours of overtime, earning extra pay of \$136,723. Another marathon man: Sergeant Barry Bloom, put in 1,730 hours of OT, for a total salary of \$223,125. The columnists said that Sergeant Bloom and Deputy Santiago also didn't want to talk. "Guess they're just too busy," the columnists wrote. (Source: San Francisco Chronicle, February 21.)

Region: So. California

Jurisdiction: State

Source: SF Chronicle - Feb. 21, 2007

State Workers Get Another Holiday

Dollar Amount: \$46,500,000

State employees, who now have 13 paid holidays, are getting another through the August 10 passage of SB 984 (Polanco). Governor Gray Davis said he would sign the legislation, which designates March 31, Cesar Chavez' birthday, as a state holiday. The cost to taxpayers: \$46.5 million a year. Mr. Chavez founded and led the United Farm Workers of America. Ironically, it will not be a holiday for farm workers. As a result, the Chavez family was reluctant to support the idea until an educational component was added. (2000)

Region: Statewide

Jurisdiction: State

Source: SB 984 approved on August 10, 2000

San Francisco Pay: Six Figure Club Grows

Dollar Amount: \$34,000,000

Some 1,200 San Francisco employees made at least \$100,000 last year, with more than half of them reaching that plateau because of overtime pay, according to the San Francisco Chronicle's February 15 coverage of a city controller's report. San Francisco taxpayers had a \$103.7 million bill for overtime in 2000, which is \$34 million over budget and up from \$63 million in Willie Brown's first year as mayor (1996). And this has occurred despite an additional 4,000 people added to the payroll with Mr. Brown at the helm. Most of those on the OT gravy train: police officers, firefighters, transit workers and sheriff's deputies. By the way, in 1998, the mayor was the 13th-highest paid city "employee." Last year, he ranked 26th at \$152,107. The top salary: \$194,772 for Public Health Director Mitchell Katz. The leading overtime employee: Muni bus dispatcher Evette Geer-Stevens, who worked more than 2,000 hours for time-and-a-half pay to add \$94,288 in overtime to her annual salary of \$62,239, according to the Chronicle article.

Region: Bay Area

Jurisdiction: City

Source: SF Chronicle - Feb. 15, 2001

Missed Workdays

Dollar Amount: \$10,000,000

Missed workdays by county employees are costing Santa Barbara County taxpayers \$10 million a year, according to the Santa Barbara News Press. Collectively, county bureaucrats are absent 444,000 hours a year. While most of the hours are attributable to sick leave and approved leaves of absence, the county absentee rate is greater than average absentee rates for government employees. In Santa Barbara County, the average employee uses 11.4 of 12 allotted sick leave days. According to County Administrator Michael Brown, "There is nothing wrong with getting sick. What hurts the county is a person who uses sick days as vacation days." (Editor's note: Wonder what this problem would amount to in statewide waste of taxpayer dollars. Or is this a situation unique to Santa Barbara County?) (1999)

Region: So. California

Jurisdiction: County

Source: Santa Barbara News-Press - 1999

Oakland Squanders Millions on Employee Goodies

Dollar Amount: \$6,798,000

An audit by Oakland City Auditor Courtney Ruby found that the city is squandering millions on city employee bonuses, leaves, cash-for-vacation deals and auto allowances that exceed compensation amounts set in labor contracts. Some examples: The city granted \$3 million in management leave in 2005 and 2006, when current Attorney General Jerry Brown was mayor, granting hundreds of thousands of dollars more than allowed under work contracts or other city rules, including granting leave totaling \$97,000 to 10 executive managers; From 2004 to 2006, the city awarded \$388,000 in cash to 324 employees for special recognition or job bonuses, and had few guidelines for how payments were awarded; The city pays nearly \$700,000 a year for automobile allowances for 238 employees; The city overpaid employees \$2.5 million in vacation leave; The city overpaid employees \$113,000 in sick leave. The Chronicle's Chip Johnson had this take on the audit: "Ruby's determination to publish the report without bowing to political pressure – she was invited to Oakland Mayor Ron Dellums' office Monday to discuss her findings – shows a strong resolve to do the right thing, never mind the politics. Her work has prompted criticism across city departments and throughout the city's bureaucracy." During the audit, most city departments did not provide all the documents her office requested. And some officials questioned her authority to conduct such a study, if you can believe that. "City Administrator Deborah Edgerly discredited the report, perhaps because she is identified as one of the people acting beyond her scope – and outside the rules. Ruby didn't waver, kowtow to internal pressure or go along to get along. The cooperation was a challenge, and some departments didn't provide information," Ruby said in an interview Thursday. "As an auditor, I've never experienced that. She has shrugged off the criticism – including a particularly zealous response from Edgerly – who approved leaves, bonuses, payroll advances and other payments flagged in the report." (Source: San Francisco Chronicle, November 29 and 30.)

Region: Bay Area

Jurisdiction: City

Source: SF Chron - Nov. 29, 2007

Harassed Whistle Blower Wins

Dollar Amount: \$4,000,000

A jury's \$4 million award of taxpayer money has been affirmed by a Sacramento County Superior Court judge for a state Department of Education whistle-blower, James Lindberg. The jury agreed with the veteran department employee's claim that he was harassed and demoted for telling authorities about fraud in the spending of \$11 million in federal funds for adult citizenship classes. Although tossing out the jury's punitive damages award against then-Superintendent of Public Instruction Delaine Eastin, calling it based on "more speculation than the law allows," Judge Brian Van Camp wrote that from testimony the jury could have believed Ms. Eastin "knew of the fraud perpetrated upon the state" and "either was not concerned about it or had political motivation not to curtail it sooner." According to testimony at the trial, Ms. Eastin was pressured by Latino state legislators to fund community-based organizations to conduct the classes. The story was in The Sacramento Bee (February 11, 2003).

Region: Statewide

Jurisdiction: State

Source: Sacramento Bee - Feb. 11, 2003

Legislators' Ideas Cost Millions Just to Print

Dollar Amount: \$3,000,000

The next time you roll your eyes in wonderment about how there can be several thousand things wrong that require new laws, consider this: Just the printing costs for the perennial flood of bills introduced by the 120 senators and Assembly members is likely to exceed \$3 million for this two-year session. Orange County Register Capitol Watchdog columnist Brian Joseph, noting that California state legislators had provided fodder for comedians with such proposals as a ban on spanking children and the traditional light bulb, asked some questions about how much it costs to introduce and run a bill. The Legislative Analyst's Office has put the average cost of introducing a bill at \$13,700, but backed away from that figure because it could not estimate how much staff time and effort are put into developing a bill. That \$13,700 included estimates of staff and legal counsel on bills, added to printing costs. So, the columnist focused only on printing costs and found that, according to the Department of General Services, taxpayers pay \$1.75 for every page of a bill to be printed. Each new bill requires 1,700 copies. A one-page bill would be \$29.75 for all the copies, but the reasonable average for a bill is five to 10 pages, for a cost of between \$407,723.75 and \$815,447.50 to print all of the bills introduced this year (2,741 were introduced this year by the February 23 deadline in this first year of a two-year session. There is no deadline for introductions of constitutional amendments or resolutions. This deadline, of course, does not apply to special sessions.) Most bills are amended, many more than once, during the process, and must be reprinted each time. Mr. Joseph wrote that it costs somewhere between \$29.75 and \$13,700 just to introduce a bill. The state spent \$2.6 million on legislation printing during the 2005-06 session. (Source: Orange County Register, March 2.)

Region: Statewide

Jurisdiction: State

Source: OC Register - March 2, 2007

California Owes \$2.9 Million from Improper Secretary of State Conduct

Dollar Amount: \$2,900,000

The federal Election Assistance Commission has ordered California to repay \$2.9 million that was improperly spent during the administration of former Secretary of State Kevin Shelley. He resigned in March 2005 in the face of bipartisan criticism. California has been the only state penalized by the election commission for misusing federal Help America Vote Act Funds. The state received \$349 million since 2003. The commission said \$536,112 was spent for purposes not allowed by the law and \$2.4 million was spent on allowable activities but lacking documentation. State and federal audits found that state employees were paid with federal money for consulting and other partisan political activity, including purchases of buttons and balloons to promote Mr. Shelley. (Caltaxletter: 10/27/06 from San Francisco Chronicle, 10/17/06.)

Region: Statewide

Jurisdiction: State

Source: SF Chronicle - Oct. 17, 2006

Former Riverside Public Safety Officials Accused of \$2 Million Embezzlement **Dollar Amount: \$2,000,000**

A former communications director for the Riverside County fire department and a former sheriff's lieutenant were arrested January 13 and charged with embezzling \$2 million from the county fire department. Riverside County Sheriff Bob Doyle said Michael Burton and Steven Vaughn are the two prime suspects in the case, stemming from an 18-month investigation into purchases of radios, computers and other communications equipment by the fire department. Mr. Burton entered not-guilty pleas to all charges on January 17, while Mr. Vaughn's arraignment was set for later in the month. (Sources: Riverside Press-Enterprise of January 17 and Los Angeles Times of January 18.)

Region: So. California

Jurisdiction: County

Source: LA Times - Jan. 18, 2007

Plan to Give LA County Administrator More Power Will Cost Taxpayers Plenty **Dollar Amount: \$1,700,000**

That reorganization plan adopted by the Los Angeles County supervisors earlier this year to shift more power to the county administrator is expected to cost taxpayers \$1.7 million. (Supervisor Mike Antonovich opposed the move.) According to a report issued May 7, five new executive positions will be created. (Source: Los Angeles Times, May 8.) (Cal-Tax: For the additional \$1.7 million, will taxpayers get from this reorganization plan less input into county operations? Since the new plan prohibits supervisors from giving orders to county employees, will taxpayers lose further control over operations of county bureaucrats?)

Region: So. California

Jurisdiction: County

Source: LA Times - May 8, 2007

Paid Leave Costs Mount

Dollar Amount: \$1,340,000

Since 1999, Orange County District Attorney Tony Rackauckas has suspended 14 attorneys, investigators and clerical staff for a total of 1,602 days with full pay and benefits. The cost to taxpayers: \$740,000. Plus, two of the employees have been reinstated with back pay of \$600,000, bringing to more than \$1.34 million paid or owed to district attorney employees for not working, reported the Los Angeles Times (April 13). Mr. Rackauckas has declined to discuss the issue but in February he told county supervisors that he has been unable to hire 13 prosecutors because of a serious budget shortfall. Tom Wilson, chair of the Board of Supervisors, said administrative leave is necessary during investigations but should not drag on for months.

Region: So. California

Jurisdiction: County

Source: LA Times - April 13, 2004

City of Los Angeles Overpaid Insurance Premiums

Dollar Amount: \$1,200,000

Los Angeles City Controller Laura Chick, in an audit released November 20, says the city overpaid \$1.2 million in insurance premiums for city employees, and paid millions more too quickly, losing \$400,000 in interest. She also found that the city underpaid disability premiums for some employees. The errors occurred in the Personnel Department. Ms. Chick said, "It's part of a bigger problem we have in the city in collecting data and watching how our money is spent." (Source: Torrance Daily Breeze, November 21.)

Region: So. California

Jurisdiction: City

Source: Torrance Daily Breeze - Nov. 21, 2007

Fired "Millionaire" Manager

Dollar Amount: \$1,000,000

The Redondo Beach City Council approved a \$1 million settlement to former City Manager Bill Kirchhoff, who was fired in 1997 for allegedly spying on a police union's private meeting. As reported in the March 31 Los Angeles Times, city officials say the case was settled at the insistence of the city's insurance company, which covers half of the settlement. The rest comes from taxpayers. Council Member Gerard Bisignano said the lawsuit lacked merit but the settlement was a business decision. Mr. Kirchhoff, in his lawsuits against the city, said the council fired him in exchange for valuable election endorsements from the police union. He said union leaders wanted him out of the way so he couldn't expose irregularities in police overtime. Mr. Kirchhoff denied that he directed employees to secretly monitor a police union meeting to get information on unwarranted overtime. Mr. Kirchhoff was hired as city manager in 1991 and was credited with improving city finances, but council members said he became difficult to work with.

Region: So. California

Jurisdiction: City

Source: LA Times - Mar. 31, 2000

Report: Public-Sector Unions Get in Way of Fight Against Waste

Dollar Amount: \$1,000,000

According to a Heartland Institute article, recent studies by Citizens Against Government Waste (CAGW) show public-sector unions are among the biggest obstacles in the fight against state and local government waste, fraud and abuse. The article said CAGW reports have found in almost every state examined so far that public employee unions use political influence to create budget problems. For example, the Los Angeles Daily News reported in November 2005 that the Los Angeles Community College District lost nearly \$1 million over three years on its food-service operations. Cafeteria workers were paid \$15 an hour plus benefits. State law required the district to use unionized employees to cook lunches and operate cash registers. In Minnesota, the teachers union lobbied against the intent of a quality compensation program, which was to replace a pay system based on college degrees and tenure with one based on student performance. Ultimately, a watered-down version of the bill passed, appeasing the union. The CAGW, through its series of "Piglet Books," has chronicled use of lobbying power by government employee unions to gain extravagant pay and benefits and to dictate public policy while undermining transparency and accountability. (Source: Heartland Institute Budget & Tax News, February 1, 2007 issue.)

Region: Statewide

Jurisdiction: State

Source: Heartland Institute Budget and Tax News

Hollister Pays nearly \$1 Million in Overtime

Dollar Amount: \$900,000

In the 2006-07 fiscal year, the city of Hollister paid more than \$900,000 in overtime, according to records unearthed by the Hollister Free Lance. Most of the overtime is attributed to police and fire personnel. One police officer worked 820 hours of overtime (that averages to about 16 hours a week for 52 weeks) and got \$39,000 in extra pay. According to the paper, this employee will make more than \$100,000 a year and will rank as the seventh highest paid city employee if overtime is the same this fiscal year. Kris Vosburgh, of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association, said the high use of overtime reflects "a failure of management." (Source: Hollister Free Lance, November 21.)

Region: Bay Area

Jurisdiction: City

Source: Hollister Free Lance - Nov. 21, 2007

Pay for No Work

Dollar Amount: \$500,000

Eighteen employees of Oakland have been paid more than \$500,000 while missing more than three months of work. Eleven are police officers on administrative leave as a result of a court order stemming from a corruption scandal. This has caused the city to pay out nearly \$12 million in 2004 to settle more than 100 cases of police misconduct. That still leaves seven employees out of 4,000 on the payroll who are paid to do nothing. In San Jose, with 7,000 employees, seven are on administrative leave with pay. Berkeley has four of its 1,600 employees being paid to stay home. (Caltaxletter: 3/31/06 from San Francisco Chronicle, 3/27/06.)

Region: Bay Area

Jurisdiction: City

Source: SF Chronicle - Mar. 27, 2006

Crescent City Council Members Wrongly Received Hundreds of Thousands in Benefits, Report Concludes

Dollar Amount: \$250,000

A confidential legal analysis obtained by the Crescent City Daily Triplicate concludes that City Council members wrongly received hundreds of thousands in benefits, the paper reported June 30. Exactly how much was received in nearly 15 years remains undetermined, but according to city records, council members were paid \$250,000 in addition to their salaries from January 2003 to December 2006. Payments were stopped after December. A report by the San Francisco law firm of Richards, Watson and Gershon said the payments were not authorized by law.

Region: Bay Area

Jurisdiction: City

Source: Crescent City Daily Tribune - June 30, 2007

Ventura Hires Pricy City Attorney

Dollar Amount: \$192,000

Ariel Calonne was hired by the Ventura City Council, by a 6-1 vote on July 11, to be the new city attorney. Mr. Calonne, who is the current Boulder, Colorado city attorney, did not come cheap: He will get a base salary of \$192,000 a year. The city also will contribute \$12,000 annually to a retirement account, and he's eligible for a 7 percent bonus, or \$13,440, if he achieves performance goals. The city also will provide a \$350 monthly car allowance, will cover his moving expenses, and will pay for up to five round-trip coach airfares between Denver and Los Angeles in his first six months, or until 10 days after he sells his Boulder house. Councilman Jim Monahan cast the lone "no" vote, expressing concerns about the cost, and about criminal charges pending in Boulder as a result of a dispute between Mr. Calonne and a neighbor. Mr. Calonne was ticketed last month by Boulder police on suspicion of misdemeanor harassment and criminal mischief after a confrontation with a female neighbor, after his leashed dog walked on her property. The woman told police Calonne threatened her and kicked two sprinkler heads. Calonne has said he did nothing wrong and expects to be cleared of the charges. (Source: Ventura County Star, July 12.)

Region: So. California

Jurisdiction: City

Source: Venutra County Star - July 12, 2007

San Bernardino County Gives Judges Extra \$\$

Dollar Amount: \$171,000

San Bernardino County gives judges \$19,700 in benefits, in addition to their \$171,000 salaries paid by the state. Critics say this creates the appearance of a conflict of interest in cases where the county is a party. The county grand jury says the county should stop or significantly reduce the payments. Cost to taxpayers of this extra benefit: \$1.3 million. (Source: Inland Valley Daily Bulletin, July 2.) (Cal-Tax: In Los Angeles County, judges receive a similar pay augmentation, labeled a "professional development allowance." Under the state constitution, the Legislature is to set the salaries of judges, which makes any extra salary given by a county appear to be an illegal gift of public funds.)

Region: So. California

Jurisdiction: County

Source: Inland Valley Daily Bulletin - July 2, 2007

State Pays to Muzzle Former Employee

Dollar Amount: \$160,000

The California Earthquake Agency has agreed to pay its CEO David Knowles, who will resign January 16, \$160,000 this year to keep his mouth shut. The Associated Press reported on December 24 that Mr. Knowles, a Republican former Assembly member, and State Treasurer Phil Angelides, a Democrat, fought over a report on whether the agency had funds to pay claims. The AP report, citing industry sources, said that Mr. Knowles was pressured to resign, but an agency statement issued after a December 17 board meeting depicted the resignation as voluntary. The details of the report were unavailable. All parties declined comment, as required by the \$160,000 settlement. Mr. Knowles also waived potential legal claims.

Region: Statewide

Jurisdiction: State

Source: Associated Press - Dec. 24, 2002

San Jose Officials Violate Spending Policies

Dollar Amount: \$135,000

Taxpayer money has been used by San Jose officials to buy gifts for VIPs while also violating spending policies limiting spending for meals and travel, among other things. A city auditor report found the control weaknesses increase the risk of fraud, waste and abuse. The city manager's meal expense restriction was violated by the spending of \$135,000 in a 12-month period, including a six-person lunch costing \$226, including a \$25 steak. A city employee charged \$400 for personal car expenses at a Hayward tire and auto shop. Another charged a \$400 limousine ride from the Newark airport to a hotel. The Police Department expensed \$24,000 for catered food without a purchase order. Six \$95 Tiffany key rings were given to visiting Japanese airport officials. Three \$180 Mont Blanc pens were given to airline executives. (Caltaxletter: 9/29/06 from San Jose Mercury News, 9/18/06, and the city's audit report.

Region: Bay Area

Jurisdiction: City

Source: San Jose Mercury News - Sept. 18, 2006

Carmel Mail Service

Dollar Amount: \$84,000

Apparently the city of Carmel (Monterey County) is so flush it can afford to pay for mail service that the U.S. Post Office will deliver for free. On January 9, the Carmel City Council gave a green light to a contract with a private courier for those who want it delivered from the post office to private residences. Cost to taxpayers: \$36,000 to 100 residences and \$84,000 to 200 residences. The U.S. Post Office said it will deliver the mail for free as soon as the city allows for street addresses and mailboxes. To maintain its quaint (some call it quirky) character, the city does not permit street addresses or mailboxes.

Region: Bay Area

Jurisdiction: City

Source: Carmel City Council - Jan. 9, 2001

Bee Asks: Why Pay "Hush Money" to Departing City Manager?

Dollar Amount: \$80,000

The Sacramento Bee (November 29) editorialized against the Sacramento City Council-approved deal with its retiring city manager, paying \$80,000 to get him to leave early – and silently. The early retirement agreement dissolves if either party, Bob Thomas or the City Council member, says anything negative of the other. If the agreement is violated, all the extra compensation is forfeited. In addition, top managers of the city, including Mr. Thomas, will get 10 percent retroactive raises. "For Thomas, this parachute is a little too golden," The Bee said. "Paying \$80,000 to go away quietly? One shudders at what council members this holiday season would have given to Thomas had they actually been trying to keep him." For Mr. Thomas, the raise "will be the gift that keeps on giving." Raising his salary to \$208,900 will plug into the formula that calculates his retirement pay. That retroactive pay raise may boost his annual retirement pay to about \$150,000. (Sacramento Bee, November 29, 2005.)

Region: C. Valley

Jurisdiction: City

Source: Sacramento Bee - Nov. 29, 2005

Cost to Remodel Senator Corbett's Office

Dollar Amount: \$65,000

Approximately \$65,000 has been spent to remodel incoming Senator Ellen Corbett's new office in the Capitol. The amount to remodel this 850-square-foot office is one-third of the total spent to remodel all Senate offices this year. Secretary of the Senate Greg Schmidt said long-overdue repairs and a new carpet added to the cost. (Source: Capitol Weekly of January 18.)

Region: C. Valley

Jurisdiction: State

Source: Capitol Weekly - Jan. 18, 2007

San Jose Pays City Employees \$45,000 to Stay Home

Dollar Amount: \$45,000

During the first month after a sexual harassment scandal sent San Jose's city auditor and most of his staff out on paid leave, taxpayers were forced to pay roughly \$45,000 for the staffers to stay home. The San Jose Mercury News reports: "Embattled Auditor Gerald Silva, who abruptly went on leave May 17, said the total bill eventually could exceed a half-million dollars, noting that his salary alone costs the city more than \$15,000 a month. As many as half a dozen members of the office have been out on various leaves because of the scandal." In addition to the salaries being paid to staffers who are sitting at home watching Oprah, the city also is paying replacements to do the auditing work. The city has paid a consultant \$70,000 to conduct one audit, and has hired a retired state auditor for \$10,000 to manage the 16-member office for a short time. The City Council reportedly is considering ousting Mr. Silva before his contract expires in 2009. Problems began this spring, when a senior auditor sued the city and the deputy city auditor for sexual harassment. Mr. Silva was not named as a defendant, but the suit said he and others in the office created a "sexually pervasive and hostile work environment." (Source: San Jose Mercury News, July 20.)

Region: Bay Area

Jurisdiction: City

Source: San Jose Mercury News - July 20, 2007

Senators Collected \$36,000 in Per Diem During Budget Impasse

Dollar Amount: \$36,000

The final tally for the state budget standoff totals nearly \$36,000 in per diem collected by state senators during the month the Senate was supposed to be in recess. Senators Lou Correa and Alan Lowenthal refused to collect the extra money during the impasse, and Senator Darrell Steinberg turns down per diem year-round because he represents a Sacramento district and thus does not need to travel far to get to the Capitol. (Source: The Sacramento Bee, August 28.)

Region: Statewide

Jurisdiction: State

Source: Sacramento Bee - Aug. 28, 2007

Mayor's Travel Hit

Dollar Amount: \$34,238

Fairfield Mayor George Pettygrove has been criticized by his political foes for taking 31 trips paid for by the city in the last three years, reports the Fairfield Daily Republic (October 30). They also say he took his daughter to lunch 23 times on his expense account. The records, obtained by City Council Member Karin MacMillan, showed \$34,238 in travel and entertainment expenses. Mr. Pettygrove said most of the trips were to Washington, D.C. to lobby against closure of Travis Air Force Base, or to get money to fix the Interstate 80/680 interchange. The city paid for lunches that he had with his daughter, the president of the local school board. The mayor said he and his daughter served on the same school district-city committees. (2001)

Region: C. Valley

Jurisdiction: City

Source: Daily Republic - Oct. 30, 2001

Flying High with Tax Dollars

Dollar Amount: \$16,000

Following up on its "I-Team" report of a state employee commuting from San Diego to San Francisco at taxpayer expense, KOVR 13 in Sacramento had this report on March 2: Labor Commissioner Arthur Lujan has reimbursed the state more than \$5,000. This, the station reported, was partly because he had failed to get prior permission for relocation expenses. He lives in Escondido, near San Diego, but his state office is in San Francisco. Another state employee, a whistle-blower complainer, told the station that the inappropriate expenses amounted to more than \$16,000. However, Department of Industrial Relations spokesperson Dean Fryer said the expense claims were for legitimate state business travel. The Department of Personnel Administration also concluded that Mr. Lujan's primary residence, by state rules, is 455 Golden Gate Avenue, in San Francisco. Does he really live there? Mr. Fryer: "He does not live in the building" but it is irrelevant because the state can use the San Francisco office address to validate travel claims. He said he could not explain DPA regulations and suggested that the reporter, Jon Baird, go to the DPA for answers. Does this mean that Mr. Lujan's trips to his home in San Diego County are business trips and apparently OK since he "lives" in his office? This address issue is "bizarre," said Bob Stern of the Center for Governmental Studies. It's been a year since KOVR's I-Team began checking Mr. Lujan's expense records. Stay tuned.

Region: Statewide

Jurisdiction: State

Source: KOVR 13 Sacramento - "I-Team," Mar. 2, 2002

Golf Retreat

Dollar Amount: \$15,000

Led by City Manager Bob Thomas, some 35 leaders of various Sacramento agencies spent three days at Greenhorn Creek Resort for a \$15,000 retreat, reported the Sacramento Bee's R.E. Graswich (September 28). The resort features a golf course and an idyllic place near Angels Camp where the city management folk can relax, and Mayor Heather Fargo said she would have some questions to ask of the group that usually meets monthly in Sacramento. "I will question the cost and the need for three days," she said. (2001)

Region: C. Valley

Jurisdiction: City

Source: Sacramento Bee - RE Graswich, Sept. 28, 2001

L.A. City Attorney Admist that Wife Damaged City Car

Dollar Amount: \$1,222

Los Angeles City Attorney Rocky Delgadillo had a bad week. First, he broke his silence on the issue of taxpayer-financed repairs to his city car, admitting that his wife was behind the wheel when the car hit a pole in a parking garage, in violation of rules that prohibit spouses from using city vehicles. His wife, who was driving on a suspended license at the time, on June 20 pleaded no contest to driving without a license, and received a sentence of one year's probation and a \$431 fine. Mr. Delgadillo reimbursed the city for the \$1,222 repair bill. "I mishandled the situation, and I apologize," he said, explaining why he took more than a week to answer questions about who was driving the vehicle at the time of the accident three years ago. However, the city attorney may have a new problem. The Los Angeles Times, which uncovered the driving incident, reported June 21 that Mr. Delgadillo has used staff members for babysitting and running errands on the city's time. The newspaper said seven former or current city employees said they saw him use staff for personal reasons. Mr. Delgadillo's office issued a statement saying the staffers offered assistance only "on their lunch breaks or other personal time." (Sources: Los Angeles Times, June 21; Los Angeles Daily News, June 19 and June 20.)

Region: So. California

Jurisdiction: City

Source: LA Times - June 21, 2007

San Jose City Employees Pilfering Snacks

Dollar Amount:

According to a San Jose Mercury News story, a number of city employees have had their hands in the government cookie jar. They apparently have been pilfering sodas, bottled water, granola bars and other goodies from the pantry in the City Council's "green room." Over one weekend, they cleaned out the entire pantry. The snacks, purchased with taxpayers' money, are available at no charge to council members, usually during long meetings. According to City Clerk Lee Price, 163 employees have key cards to access the "green room." Now, she has ordered the pantry locked, and she is the only one with a key. (Source: Internal Affairs, San Jose Mercury News, November 11.)

Region: Bay Area

Jurisdiction: City

Source: San Jose Mercury News - Nov. 11, 2007

Government Workers Committing Welfare Fraud

Dollar Amount:

According to the Los Angeles Daily News, "A growing number of government workers commit welfare fraud." For example, in 1988 Rita Brown started working as a retirement specialist for Los Angeles County. However, she used a second Social Security number and driver's license, using the name of Rita Kay Fellows to collect welfare benefits for the next 19 years from the county. In June, she was convicted and sentenced to pay \$89,522 and serve 16 months in prison. The Los Angeles County District Attorney also recently prosecuted some U.S. Postal Service employees who were collecting welfare benefits fraudulently. County Auditor-Controller Tyler McCauley's recent fraud hotline report stated that investigations in county government rose 19 percent in the past six months, with an unusually large number of cases with large dollar losses. (Source: Los Angeles Daily News, November 23.)

Region: So. California

Jurisdiction: County

Source: LA Daily News - Nov. 23, 2007

Los Angeles Salaries are Tops

Dollar Amount:

A report from Los Angeles Chief Administrative Officer William Fujioka recommends no salary hikes in 2001 for the city's top bureaucrats. No wonder. They already make more than their counterparts in other public agencies across America, and their benefits are better, too. For example, Ron Deaton, the city's chief legislative analyst, gets \$239,849 a year, compared to \$109,540 for his counterpart in New York City. Police Chief Bernard Parks, at \$228,678, makes tens of thousands of dollars more than heads of police departments in other large cities. Mayor Richard Riordan takes just \$1 a year, although he is entitled to more than \$150,000. The internal city report was covered in January 5 editions of the Daily News and the Los Angeles Times.

Region: So. California

Jurisdiction: City

Source: LA Daily News - Jan. 5, 2001

Investigator: Vallejo Firefighters Abused Union Business Leave

Dollar Amount:

Vallejo firefighters have abused union business leave provisions, an investigator hired by the city has charged. Attorney Douglas Freifeld, hired by the city several months ago, reported that union leaders took advantage of a "hands off" approach by a former fire chief who permitted abalone diving and attendance at political events, and by not returning to work after traveling or drinking alcohol. Union attorney Alan Davis responded that "this document is false in every respect and was clearly leaked just three days before the election to distract Vallejoans from the real issue, which is the plan to lay off firefighters." (Source: Vallejo Time-Herald, November 4.)

Region: Bay Area

Jurisdiction: City

Source: Vallejo Time-Herald - Nov. 4, 2007

Oakland Mayor Ron Dellums Taking Care of Number One

Dollar Amount:

Oakland Mayor Ron Dellums is taking care of number one. According to Matier and Ross in the San Francisco Chronicle, Mr. Dellums is asking the City Council to increase his office budget by a cool \$1 million. This will include seven new or redefined staff positions, including a \$130,000-a-year chief of staff and both a full-time bodyguard and driver. The proposal would increase staff positions from 17 when Jerry Brown was mayor to 24. According to the mayor's budget chief Dan Lindheim, half the cost of the increase will be covered by taking money from the School for the Arts. Also, Mr. Dellums is asking for \$100,000 to cover the \$60,000 pay raise and benefit package the council recently approved for him. One anonymous council member said, "It would be insane for me to criticize (Dellums) in public. We have to work with him. The facts speak for themselves." (Source: San Francisco Chronicle, May 7.)

Region: Bay Area

Jurisdiction: City

Source: SF Chronicle - May 7, 2007

- Bay Bridge Will Cost More. City Official on Sick Leave is Teaching

Dollar Amount:

In what should hardly come as a surprise, especially in light of the massive cost overruns already plaguing the project, construction of the new Bay Bridge will cost \$140 million more than expected, officials say. But this time, there's an unusual twist: The increase, due to rising costs of materials and construction, changes in schedules and efforts to shorten a temporary detour on Yerba Buena Island, could prevent more costly and frustrating delays, officials contend. The projected increases in costs will be covered by a \$900 million contingency fund included in the \$6.3 billion construction budget. (Source: San Francisco Chronicle, March 8.)

Region: So. California

Jurisdiction: City

Source: San Diego Union-Tribune - March 9, 2007

Santa Clara County Attorney Tried Cases After Suspension

Dollar Amount:

From September 13, 2006 to December 28, 2006, Santa Clara County Deputy District Attorney John Moore was barred by the California Bar Association from practicing law for failing to pay dues. However, he continued to try cases during his suspension. The District Attorney's office said an investigation is under way on the cases handled under suspension. "We may have to defend some motions; we may not," Chief Assistant District Attorney Marc Buller said. The county public defender, Nancy Brener, said there's a possibility some cases can be reheard. (Source: San Jose Mercury News of March 7.)

Region: Bay Area

Jurisdiction: County

Source: San Jose Mercury News - March 7, 2007

Public Safety Workers Most Likely to Retire with Disability in LA County

Dollar Amount:

A report released March 5 shows that Los Angeles County sheriff's deputies and firefighters are retiring with disability pensions – and tax advantages – at a rate nearly 50 percent higher than those in 19 other California counties. The Buck Consultants report was ordered by the Board of Supervisors more than two years ago, when the board wanted to find out whether employees were fraudulently obtaining disability pensions. The Los Angeles Daily News had reported that an average of 79 percent of firefighters and 56 percent of deputy sheriffs had job-related disability retirements in the decade before 2005. Investigators said they found no fraud among 35 cases they analyzed, but there were four whose justifications "contradicted" the original intent of a law granting disability pensions. Investigators said they found the practice of "spiking" final pay with unused vacation, sick leave and other one-time payments to be a common practice among county employees as they approached retirement. Risk Manager Rocky Armfield: "There really is a culture of maximizing benefits. And the employees are very good at it." The Daily News, in an editorial, said: "If there is any hope of keeping the county's pension system from bankrupting the treasury, steps must be taken to revise state law that allows for such abuse. The county Board of Supervisors has plenty of influence in California's politics. Now's the time for members to wield it before it's too late." (Source: Los Angeles Daily News, March 5-6.)

Region: So. California

Jurisdiction: County

Source: LA Daily News - March 5, 2007

Sleeping on the Job is a Firing Offense

Dollar Amount:

Reversing a trial court verdict, the Second District Court of Appeal in Los Angeles has ruled that a Los Angeles city employee was properly fired for sleeping on a hammock underneath his truck during working hours. Kenneth Flippin was caught sleeping by a Department of Water and Power supervisor in April 2003, when he also made an obscene gesture and refused to remove his hammock from the truck. Management recommended that he be fired for insubordination, sleeping on the job and engaging in misconduct that negatively reflected on city employees because it was in public view at a jobsite. Mr. Flippin, through a union representative, offered to retire in lieu of dismissal, and the offer was being accepted until Mr. Flippin withdrew it when he found that being fired would reduce his retirement benefits. Thus, he went the route of administrative appeal, with the firing upheld. But Superior Court Judge Dzintra Janavs ruled dismissal was an excessive penalty in light of the man's record, which included two suspensions in 16 years with the department. Justice Victoria Chavez wrote that Mr. Flippin was not denied due process because he was not given a pre-termination hearing. This was waived when he offered to retire, even though the offer was rescinded. Since the charges were true, the trial court was required to uphold a reasonable penalty, the appellate justice wrote. (Sources: Metropolitan News-Enterprise, March 5, and Kenneth Flippin v. Los Angeles City Board of Civil Service Commissioners and L.A. Department of Water and Power, March 1.)

Region: Statewide

Jurisdiction: State

Source: Metropolitan News-Enterprise - March 5, 2007

Two Government Attorneys Get Big Bucks for Leaving

Dollar Amount:

In jurisdictions that otherwise have not much in common, both Humboldt County and the city of Elk Grove in Sacramento County have showered attorneys leaving local government employment with a bundle of taxpayer dollars. Also in both cases, they did not want the press to find out and forced reporters to make Public Information Act requests. Humboldt County is paying \$289,000 to former County Counsel Tamara Falor, who is leaving for unknown reasons. The vote to pay the amount was 3-2, with Supervisors Jimmy Smith and Jill Geist voting no. In Elk Grove, outgoing City Attorney Anthony Manzanetti will walk with \$143,300 on March 12. The city declined to discuss the matter, and The Sacramento Bee made two Public Records Act requests to get the information. No reason was stated for Mr. Manzanetti's departure. (Sources: Sacramento Bee of March 4 and Eureka Times-Standard of March 4.)

Region: C. Valley

Jurisdiction: County

Source: Sacramento Bee - March 4, 2007

Audit Finds Taxpayers Foot Bill for personal Calls and Other Improprieties **Dollar Amount:**

In a seven-month investigation of nine cases involving improper governmental activities, the State Audit Bureau found that taxpayers are footing the bill for hours upon hours of personal phone calls and other inappropriate activity. Examples include a Parks and Recreation employee who made 3,300 personal telephone calls over a 13-month period on his state-issued cell phone. In another case, a Sonoma State University employee listed Sonoma State's cell phone number and e-mail address as his primary contact information for one of his two private side businesses.

Region: Statewide

Jurisdiction: State

Source: State Audit

Los Angeles Payroll Snafu May Be Worse Than First Reported **Dollar Amount:**

In prior issues, Cal-Taxletter has reported on the Los Angeles Unified School District's new payroll snafu, and the fact that the state is installing the same system. Bob Sipchen of the Los Angeles Times is reporting that the snafu may be much larger than anticipated, quoting Teachers' Union President A.J. Duffy as putting the number of teachers having problems between 20,000 and 25,000. The union has given the district 45 days to fix the problem, or court action will be initiated. (Source: Los Angeles Times, March 19.)

Region: So. California

Jurisdiction: County

Source: LA Times - March 19, 2007

Grand Jury Says Mendocino County Supervisors Are Abusing Their Travel Budgets **Dollar Amount:**

According to a report by the Mendocino County grand jury, county supervisors are making claims for mileage never driven, and, in some cases, to meetings never held. These abuses have cost taxpayers thousands of dollars, the grand jury said. The expense budget jumped from \$49,000 for 2005-06 to more than \$100,000 in 2006-07. The supervisors, in addition to a \$68,000 salary, get a \$145-a-month vehicle stipend and a \$25-per-month allowance as "county road inspectors." The grand jury also found that one supervisor was claiming mileage to and from home when the individual was staying in Ukiah at a no-cost residence. In another case, a supervisor was fabricating travel costs in order to collect money for other costs the supervisor thought should be reimbursed. One supervisor claimed 22 round trips to Ukiah in one month, a feat the jury thought unlikely, as it would have required such trips every weekday of the month. Supervisors typically meet one day a week and have committee meetings on another day. (Source: Ukiah Daily Journal, July 10.)

Region: Bay Area

Jurisdiction: County

Source: Ukiah Daily Journal - July 10, 2007

Taxpayers May Pay for Berkeley Bureaucrats' Sex Change Operations **Dollar Amount:**

Berkeley is considering including sex change operations in employee health care benefits. The City Council, by unanimous vote on May 8, ordered the city manager to do a feasibility study before the measure comes back to the council for approval in 6 months. City Councilman Darryl Moore, who sponsored the resolution, said only a few employees will apply for the benefit. (Source: Contra Costa Times, May 9.)

Region: Bay Area

Jurisdiction: City

Source: Contra Costa Times - May 9, 2007

Rosemead Councilman Likes to Travel

Dollar Amount:

Rosemead City Councilman John Nu must enjoy traveling. He has attended, at taxpayer expense, 22 conferences in the past two years. The total costs of his trips could not be calculated because of the way Rosemead files expenses. Included was a \$243.29 bill from Les Artise Steakhouse in Las Vegas, when he stayed last year at the Paris Hotel. (Cal-Tax: Not to be confused with the hotel in Paris where other well-traveled politicians have stayed.) Mr. Nu said the conferences he attends allow him to network and learn about redevelopment. "I'm just trying to be a better councilman," he added. (Source: San Gabriel Valley Tribune, October 29.)

Region: So. California

Jurisdiction: City

Source: San Gabriel Valley Tribune - Oct. 29, 2007

Los Angeles County Rewards CAO With Massive Pay Raise, Sweeping Powers

Dollar Amount:

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors voted May 22 to increase the pay for Chief Administrative Officer David Janssen from \$242,116 to as much as \$399,000 a year. On a 4-1 vote, with Supervisor Michael Antonovich opposed, the board also approved a \$1.7 million reorganization that gives Mr. Janssen the new title of chief executive officer, and new power that includes the ability to hire five deputy CEOs to oversee county departments. Starting July 1, department heads will report directly to Mr. Janssen rather than to the Board of Supervisors. The supervisors plan to put the plan on the ballot next year, asking voters to approve the reorganization as part of the County Charter. Mr. Antonovich objected on the grounds that the new structure will allow public business to be conducted in private. "Our chief administrative officer stated that the new governance system will be 'better' because policy discussions will be exempt from the Brown Act," he said. "This is a step backward toward the old days of backroom deals and catering to an all-powerful bureaucrat." Supervisor Gloria Molina said the reorganization "has a lot of promise," but acknowledged that she has some concerns. "This is a very big and bold step," she said. "But it makes me nervous and I know I'm not the only board member who is nervous about putting this in the charter and not being able to go back later and change it." The supervisors voted to give Mr. Janssen a pay raise within a range, with the top amount of \$399,000 plus benefits. "It sounds like they are being pretty generous with taxpayer dollars," Cal-Tax Director of Communications David Kline said in the Los Angeles Daily News story. "One would think when the government is facing shortfalls left and right and a really tight budget that they should be trying to conserve taxpayer dollars whenever possible, and that includes salaries for administrators and the people who should be leading by example." (Source: Los Angeles Daily News, May 22.)

Region: So. California

Jurisdiction: County

Source: LA Daily News - May 22, 2007

Merced Politicians Pad Salaries with Bogus Sick Pay

Dollar Amount:

Merced County's supervisors don't earn sick time, since they never have to use a sick day. Like other elected officials, they are paid a set salary (in their case, \$69,360), and, as the Merced Sun-Star noted in a recent editorial, "They could call in sick every day for the rest of their terms and they'd still get paid." Which is why the newspaper has been questioning supervisors about why they will receive a payout for unused sick time when they retire – a gift of \$26,010 for a supervisor with 10 years of public service, on top of any retirement pay. The perk was unanimously approved by the Board of Supervisors itself three years ago. After being badgered by the Sun-Star for weeks, Supervisor Kathleen Crookham said at a June 26 meeting that the board will consider doing away with the pay-off ... but supervisors did not seem eager to make such a change. "I'm not saying we are going to take any action, but maybe we need to look at it," Ms. Crookham said. Nor did her colleagues seem ready to cut their pay. The Modesto Bee reported: "After the meeting, supervisors' responses on the sick-leave perk ranged from cutting off interviews to open-ended conversation about it. When pressed by a reporter about the rare bonus, Chairman John Pedrozo was shuttled away after a few minutes by the county spokesman; (Jerry) O'Banion cut off the interview, refusing to discuss specifics, and Supervisor Mike Nelson asked for a list of questions before responding." Shasta and Santa Cruz counties also offer this perk, according to a Sun-Star survey of all 58 counties. (Source: Merced Sun-Star, June 26; The Modesto Bee, June 27.) (Cal-Tax: We're wondering why this didn't make it into Michael Moore's new film, "Sicko.")

Region: C. Valley

Jurisdiction: City

Source: Modesto Bee - June 27, 2007

Plumas County Grand Jury Questions Supervisors' Spending

Dollar Amount:

Plumas County supervisors have used county credit cards to purchase personal items, have exceeded the established allowance for restaurant meals and have submitted undocumented claim forms, according to a county grand jury report released this week. The supervisors also exceeded the travel budget for 2005-06 "due to excessive travel by some supervisors." (Source: Plumas County News, July 12.)

Region: C. Valley

Jurisdiction: County

Source: Plumas County News - July 12, 2007

State Senators Make Extra Cash During Budget Stalemate

Dollar Amount:

Many state senators profited financially from the state budget delay, since they were eligible for per diem payments of \$162 (to be paid after a budget is enacted) during what otherwise would have been a one-month vacation. The payments were approved every time the Senate met for a floor session during the scheduled vacation time (three sessions, totaling \$486 per senator), and also were allowed during days that senators were in Sacramento but the Senate wasn't meeting. Senators Alan Lowenthal and Lou Correa waived their per diem payments. Assembly members who went to work at the Capitol during their house's vacation break also were eligible to collect per diem. (Source: Orange County Register, August 10.)

Region: Statewide

Jurisdiction: State

Source: OC Register - Aug. 10, 2007

Assembly Hands Out Pay Raises as Budget Shortfall Grows

Dollar Amount:

Despite the state government's multibillion-dollar budget gap, the leadership of the state Assembly on October 22 voted to give Assembly employees a 6 percent across-the-board pay raise, and to increase payments toward employees' pensions. The Assembly Rules Committee voted to make the pay hikes effective November 1 for the nearly 1,200 employees who work for the 80 Assembly members. The Rules Committee has not granted an across-the-board raise since 2000, but many employees have received several pay increases since that time. The Assembly's highest paid employee, Dan Eaton, chief of staff to Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez, will see his \$200,000-a-year salary grow by \$12,000. The Sacramento Bee reported that his salary now has increased \$42,000 in two years. The Assembly also will pick up a larger portion of employees' pension costs – covering an extra 1 percent for a temporary period of less than a year. Assemblyman Hector De La Torre, who chairs the Rules Committee, said the pay raises will benefit taxpayers by reducing turnover. Jon Coupal, president of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association, said it's a bad idea to increase employee costs when the state is facing a massive budget deficit. "I think this may be an example of Nero fiddling while Rome burns," he said. (Source: The Sacramento Bee, October 23.)

Region: C. Valley

Jurisdiction: State

Source: Sacramento Bee - Oct. 23, 2007

Redlands City Treasurer Arrested

Dollar Amount:

Jon Michael Reynolds, who has been the city treasurer of Redlands for 27 years, was arrested October 24 by investigators from San Bernardino County's Public Integrity Unit. He is charged with misappropriation of public funds, keeping a false record and falsifying public documents. The county had earlier issued a search warrant for Mr. Reynolds' office. (Source: Redlands Daily Facts, October 25.)

Region: So. California

Jurisdiction: County

Source: Redlands Daily Facts - Oct. 25, 2007

San Joaquin County Employees Spend Time Editing Wikipedia Entries

Dollar Amount:

An investigation by the Stockton Record discovered that San Joaquin County employees, using taxpayer-funded computers, have been editing entries in the Wikipedia online encyclopedia that have nothing to do with their work. For example: Someone on a computer at the San Joaquin County Superior Court spent time correcting the entry for Oscar Zeta Acosta, a Riverbank-raised lawyer and writer, said to be the role model for the attorney in "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas." A city of Stockton computer was used to add "lalalalala" to an entry on Christmas ornaments. Computers registered to county employees have been used to alter entries for Wizard magazine, the "Heroes" TV series, Dick Grayson (the alter-ego of Robin from "Batman and Robin"), and the yet-to-be-released film "Big Stan." Apparently, computer entries can be traced by a new program invented by Caltech graduate student Virgil Griffith. (Source: Stockton Record, October 29.)

Region: C. Valley

Jurisdiction: County

Source: Stockton Record - Oct. 29, 2007

Government Scientists Get Paid Long After They Are Reassigned

Dollar Amount:

Scientists employed by the state can continue collecting taxpayer-funded salaries and benefits long after they leave their jobs, according to an audit released March 28 by the U.S. Department of Energy. The audit found that in 2004 and 2005, there were \$11.3 million worth of weapons lab reassignments that "were either too long, resulted in excess costs, or were not appropriately cost-shared with host entities." (Source: Contra Costa Times, March 29.)

Region: Statewide

Jurisdiction: State

Source: Contra Costa Times - March 29, 2007
