

H.B. votes through raises for city employees, despite vocal opposition

BY JULIA SCLAFANI

Despite efforts by residents to raise their voices — and honk their car horns — against raises for city employees amid a widespread economic crisis, the Huntington Beach City Council on Monday voted 4-3, with Mayor Lyn Semeta and council members Erik Peterson and Jill Hardy dissenting, to adopt contracts with city workers totaling \$5 million in raises paid over the next three years.

On April 6, the City Council voted to introduce for adoption three memorandums of understanding as they were negotiated earlier this year. The unions and city tentatively agreed on the MOUs in early February. Alternately, they could have voted for the agreements to be renegotiated.

The approved MOU will account for \$2.58 million, or 1.7%, of the city's budget, for the 2020-21 fiscal year.

The Huntington Beach Police Officers Association, representing about 250 city employees, secured a 4% base salary increase in the first year of the contract and 3.5% base increases in

the next two years.

The Huntington Beach Municipal Teamsters represents about 375 city employees, who will all receive a 3.5% pay increase in an agreement which lasts through September.

The Huntington Beach City Management Employees' Organization secured 3.5% raises for the 100 employees it represents. That agreement lasts through October.

Residents gathered at City Hall Monday afternoon to object to the raises. Starting at 4:30 p.m., approximately three dozen motorists — and a handful of cyclists — paraded through the City Hall parking lot honking horns and imploring the council to deny or delay the contracts that would give raises to more than 700 city employees.

"I think it's great that they have found a way to use their 1st Amendment right to make their voices heard," said Peterson as he watched the protest from the edge of the City Hall parking lot.

In light of social distancing measures put in place by the city, the public was barred from physically attending the meeting and

protocols were instituted to collect public comment and supplemental communication, which were read for the record by city staff.

Peterson, Hardy and Semeta attended the meeting from council chambers, while the remaining council members and City Attorney Michael Gates participated over video.

City staff took turns reading electronically submitted supplemental communications and public comments and lasting until approximately 10 p.m. — the meeting lasted 6½ hours.

"I'm disappointed that we are even talking about giving pay raises to city workers during this time. Don't you see that some small businesses won't even be able to open back up?" said one comment by Leanne Krueger. "Start listening to your constituents, not the unions."

"This needs to be tabled until our citizen city and economy have recovered from the economic downfall," Janet Lovell said.

"Please be responsible stewards of finances," Cari Swan urged.

"No matter how well deserved a pay increase may be, now is not the time,"

Ted Ross said.

William Peterson, who identified himself as a retired member of Huntington Beach Police Department, communicated his support of the compensation package, calling it "reasonable" and necessary "to maintain quality law enforcement in the city."

Some cited Huntington Beach as one of the lowest paying agencies in Orange County and argued that raises are necessary to recruit and retain personnel.

However, others on the City Council pushed back, noting that many local cities and agencies are seeing furloughs and layoffs.

"It is absolutely irresponsible for us as a city to go forward with giving \$5 million worth of raises, given what our economy is experiencing," Semeta said. "I mean how can we possibly, you know, approve an expense like this when we know a lot worse is coming?"

As a huge volume of written statements in support of the POA poured in, Councilman Patrick Brendan requested the council reconsider the process for accepting public com-



Scott Smeltzer | Staff Photographer

RESIDENTS PARTICIPATE in a drive-by parade outside of Huntington Beach City Hall on Monday in protest of a vote on union raise agreements.

ment.

"I'm not pleased with the process," Brendan said, suggesting that there are measures that could be taken to allow for community members to state their comment at City Hall with appropriate social distancing measures, such as setting up a podium outside the chamber.

"I just think the way were are doing it right now ... it looks like it's being manipulated and it can be manipulated, and even if it isn't manipulated, people can claim that it is being manipulated because it's so confusing," Brendan added.

The meeting was distinguished by the high volume of written communication, including many duplicated comments, de-

spite the staff's attempt to identify them and streamline the process.

Among the comments, there were 195 submissions of two different form letters supporting the approval of the police contracts.

"Had it not been for a unique situation ... we would have been ready to go and this would have been in the past," Councilwoman Kim Carr said, referencing the sequence of transitions in the city manager's office. "This is a fair deal ... this isn't an extravagant deal by any means."

"Sure, the world has changed in the last 30 days ... but I'm not turning my back on the negotiations," Councilwoman Barbara Delgleize said.

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BICYCLE RIDERS practice social distancing just north of the Huntington Beach Pier on April 10.



Raul Roa

TESTING

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a new peak period for the region; this run of coronavirus deaths tops a high-water mark set be-

tween March 31 and April 2, when nine people died.

Among the 33 people who have now died, 19 were older than 65, the age group considered to be most at risk.

While deaths have come

at a more sustained rate within the past week, overall new cases have decelerated significantly in the region.

As the pandemic gathered steam in mid-March, the number of known cases doubled on average once every three days between March 13-28.

On March 13, Orange County recorded 13 cases. On the 28th, that figure had climbed to 403 — it had grown 31 times over in about two weeks.

Another week would pass before Orange County's coronavirus count doubled again. The next doubling time after that stretched to two weeks, completing an-

other cycle on Saturday when the county health agency announced 1,556 cases.

Quick told the supervisors that she feels county and state stay-at-home orders have been effective, reflected in the slowing spread.

She noted that hospital patient counts have bounced around, but at a normal rate. So far, no more than 155 people have been in local hospitals on any given day with COVID-19 and no more than 75 have been in intensive care at once.

"That is all very good news," Quick said.

Also on Tuesday, the supervisors voted to loosen one restriction, on golf courses, and tighten another, on face coverings.

The mask directive mandates face coverings for essential employees working in grocery stores, pharmacies, gas stations, restaurants, convenience stores and other essential retail outlets.

It strengthens the county's earlier recommendation, but not order, suggesting face coverings for essential workers — although some cities, including Costa Mesa and Laguna Beach, have gone beyond the county's recommendation

and made masks mandatory in some instances.

Supervisor Don Wagner criticized the move, questioning whether the board was being consistent in its messaging to the public.

"I feel like we're getting whipsawed here," he said. "We have a committee discussing opening up [the county] and lifting restrictions. Now we say 'OK, fine, by the way, let's take a look at what we did last week and clamp down on restrictions.'"

One of those restrictions was on golf courses.

The supervisors unanimously agreed to allow public and private golf courses to reopen or, in some cases, stay open with certain recommendations for social distancing and cleanliness, including sanitizing golf carts after each use and staggering tee times for players. Restaurants and pro shops will remain closed.

Courses had never been specifically included on the county list of nonessential businesses, although most chose to close during the pandemic.

Supervisor Lisa Bartlett made the proposal after she said she spent about 10 hours on the phone over the weekend with golfers and golf course operators

across the county who longed to get players out on the green again as stay-at-home orders drive some people "stir crazy."

"I think this is the right direction to go," Wagner said of the golf course proposal. "We are talking about the light at the end of the tunnel and finding ways to reopen the county."

Here are the latest COVID-19 case counts for select cities, with their numbers per 10,000 residents:

- Anaheim: 215 (6 cases per 10,000 residents)
- Santa Ana: 174 (5.2 cases per 10,000 residents)
- Huntington Beach: 148 (7.3 cases per 10,000 residents)
- Irvine: 118 (4.2 cases per 10,000 residents)
- Newport Beach: 88 (10.1 cases per 10,000 residents)
- Laguna Beach: 37 (15.8 cases per 10,000 residents)
- Costa Mesa: 32 (2.8 cases per 10,000 residents)
- Fountain Valley: 25 (4.4 cases per 10,000 residents)

Updated figures are posted daily at ochealthinfo.com/coronavirus-in-oc.

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THE DAILY COMMUTER PUZZLE

By Jacqueline E. Mathews

ACROSS
 1 " walked out in the streets of Laredo..."
 4 Singer Frankie
 9 on the gas; accelerate
 13 Housetop
 15 One who calls us "earthlings"
 16 "...and a partridge in a tree"
 17 Long dismal cry
 18 One of Santa's reindeer
 19 Seldom seen
 20 Taipei folks
 22 Actress Sheedy
 23 Saucer-shaped instrument
 24 Billy _ Cyrus
 26 Outcome; result

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SUDOKU

By The Mephram Group

Complete the grid so each row, column and 3-by-3 box (in bold borders) contains every digit, 1 to 9. For strategies on how to solve Sudoku, visit sudoku.org.uk.

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| 4 | | | | | 1 | | | 3 |
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| | | 6 | | | | | | 8 |
| | | 2 | 1 | 7 | | | | |
| 8 | | | 3 | | | | | 6 |
| 7 | | | | 9 | | 3 | | |
| | 5 | 3 | | | | | 1 | 8 |

For answers to the crossword and Sudoku puzzles, see page A4.

DOWN
 1 Suffix for comment or custom
 2 Ashy residue
 3 Midwest state
 4 Like an abandoned house
 5 "Git _ Little Dogies"

6 Margarita garnish
 7 Cobb & Greenwood
 8 _ decorator; room designer
 9 Aerosols
 10 Shade of green
 11 Actor James _ Jones

12 Hunted animal
 14 Scatterbrained
 21 Courts
 25 Late great heavyweight
 26 Higher berth
 27 Wrist throb
 28 Hidden supply
 29 Take one bite of
 30 Uno & eins
 31 Extra virgin _ oil
 32 Engine
 33 Actor in a crowd scene
 35 Goes quickly
 38 Massacred
 39 Bears, boars & baboons, e.g.
 41 Football's Marino
 42 Jamie of "M*A*S*H"
 44 Spring celebration
 45 20th-century U.S. president
 47 " _ makes waste"
 48 Tapers off
 49 Feta source
 50 Asian desert
 52 Burrowing animal
 53 Fishing worm, e.g.
 54 _ up; absorb
 55 Wise man
 59 Dawn to dusk

Tribune Media Services

COUPLE

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"As soon as I heard that they were around 90 years old, I was pretty worried about them," he said.

Then he laughed.

"But when I went down to the emergency room and met them in person," Robinson said, "I realized that you could probably cut their age in half, which was their true age."

The hospital arranged for the couple — married 70 years on Feb. 18 — to room together. Dolores said she "wouldn't have had it any other way."

"Oh, it was wonderful," she said. "I got to watch him 24/7, see if he went to the bathroom or he was sleeping or he was sitting up straight."

Louis, founder of the eight-store grocery chain Super A Foods, usually started his days at Hoag tapping out orders to his employees — four of whom are their children. When he wasn't keeping up his grocery business — which got slammed during the pandemic — he slept.

Dolores, on the next bed over, got bored easily. In a recent interview, she ticked off the names of different nurses she had befriended, as well as their upcoming wedding and baby due dates.

"I just was watching what was going on and talking to all the nurses,"

she said. "Where are you from? Are you married?"

"Do you need life insurance?" she said, adding that one of her daughters sells life insurance.

Dolores and Louis kept each other company.

"One time, he looked over at me and he said, 'I love you,'" she remembered.

Dolores agreed to enroll in a clinical trial for remdesivir, an experimental drug that may lower the risk of death or improve conditions for severely ill COVID-positive patients.

One of the requirements for the study is not to get pregnant or get anyone else pregnant for 28 days, Robinson said. He asked Dolores to agree to the requirement by signing paperwork.

"She thought that was about the funniest thing she had ever heard," Robinson recalled. "The next day, I go in and see them and he's on his phone running his grocery chain business and she's sitting up bolt straight in bed. ... First thing she said: 'You know, Dr. Robinson, you told me that I'm not supposed to get pregnant but because I didn't get the drug last night — we tried.'"

Meanwhile, Mary and her six siblings text messaged daily updates about their parents, in addition to calling and FaceTiming. They sanitized their parents' home and arranged

for Chris Van Tassel, Mary's fiance, to spend a few hours a week caregiving for the couple once they returned home.

As of last Wednesday, Hoag had diagnosed 99 COVID patients, 64 of which had been admitted to the hospital. Since treating its first COVID patient in January, Hoag has been working around the clock to prepare for the uptick in coronavirus patients, Robinson said.

The Amens' presence sent a positive vibe throughout the hospital. The couple's feisty humor quickly earned them the friendship of nearly the entire 10th floor care staff, Robinson said.

"You could just see that it gave everybody that extra needed boost of energy and some hope that we're all going to come through this together," Robinson said.

Dolores hopes to soon return to her routine of driving to Indian Wells to golf or gamble.

Until then, the couple continues to regain strength at home. Louis works around his garden, clipping roses to give to his doctor. Dolores makes her husband tea and oatmeal with raisins for breakfast.

"I told him today when I took out the trash: he better get better!" Dolores said.

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