

\$55,471 raise approved for D.A. Cooley

COUNTY: Supervisors' vote will put his annual salary at \$292,300.

By **Troy Anderson**
Staff Writer

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday voted unanimously to raise the district attorney's salary by \$55,471 — about what an average county employee makes a year — to \$292,300 effective Dec. 1.

The move means that if re-elected this year, District Attorney Steve Cooley would become the county's highest-paid elected official.

"He's rapidly approaching the pay level of the president of the

United States, and that's not a good thing for anybody," said David Kline, spokesman for the California Taxpayers Association. The taxpayers simply can't afford to have every government trying to make their officials the best-paid in the land."

The vote came without discussion.

A county salary survey released Tuesday of prosecutors in 17 district attorney, city attorney and attorney general offices throughout the nation showed the highest paid is currently the Santa Clara County district attorney — who earns \$245,400, surpassing what Cooley currently earns.

But Cooley's current \$236,829 salary is higher than all the rest, including the Kings County New

York district attorney at \$190,000; Cooks County district attorney at \$179,450; California attorney general at \$184,301; Los Angeles city attorney at \$210,098 and the federal attorney general at \$191,300.

But even with the high salary, Lynn Volden, director of Cooley's Bureau of Management and Budget, said because of a recent change giving department heads merit raises Cooley's salary would fall behind what Public Defender Michael Judge makes. Judge currently earns \$237,224 annually, slightly more than Cooley.

"And unfortunately, the way this ordinance is structured, it only allows for an adjustment every four years," Volden said. "So by virtue of the timing, it creates

inequities over time if they are not looked at and adjusted."

Supervisor Gloria Molina said she is concerned about rising salaries for top county officials. Last week, Chief Executive Officer Bill Fujitaka released a report estimating the county would lose at least \$246 million under cuts proposed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

The cuts could force the county to cut services to the mostly low-income residents it serves. Genevieve Clayreuil, a former county commissioner who often criticizes the supervisors over health department decisions, raised the possibility the raise was a reward for Cooley for not proposing board members for Brown Act violations in the past. "I'm not surprised," Clayreuil

said. "I'm sure it's a reward and I'm seeing it as a reward."

But Joel Bellman, a spokesman for Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, said the assertion was faulty. "The only Brown Act violation was when the district attorney determined there had been a minor technical violation when the board members discussed closing the King-Drew trauma center and announced they would be putting this matter on an upcoming agenda," Bellman said.

"There was an interpretation that the board had already committed to that action. That was not true. The board calendared the item and after lengthy discussion on that matter held a public vote on the question. The question was not decided ahead of time. The

district attorney subsequently determined the public vote cured whatever technical violation may have occurred previously."

Supervisor Don Knabe said Clayreuil often makes allegations to Cooley about open-meeting violations.

"This district attorney has been very aggressive on public corruption," Knabe said. "I assume he investigates allegations against us, but I know at least in some of the other cities he's been very aggressive. He has a full public corruption division that we help fund in the budget. So we help fund our own investigations of ourselves."

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