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EDITORIAL: Metropolitan delay wise; speak up now

OUR VIEW: Pension raise, delay rationale both puzzling

the North County Times Opinion staff -- opinion@nctimes.com | Posted: Wednesday, September 16, 2009 12:00 am

Common sense wins a round; the only issue is, will it prevail?

The Metropolitan Water District's decision Monday to hold a public workshop on its ill-advised increase in future pension obligations was wise. However, we challenge the district's reasoning for delaying the vote originally scheduled for Tuesday.

Moreover, we still question, as we did Sunday, the need in an uncertain economy for Metropolitan to approve five-year contracts that lock in a seemingly unsustainable 25 percent increase in benefits and a pay raise for its employees starting July 1.

In making the last-minute switch to delay the vote, the district's terse announcement said it was making the move in "keeping with the transparent and open negotiating process" between it and the four unions representing Metropolitan's 1,900-plus workers. The statement also noted that the district executives wanted to "make sure that all facts regarding this proposal are fully understood" by the public and the board prior to any vote.

Funny how the district's leadership apparently didn't believe it necessary for the public or the board to have "fully understood" the details of proposed contracts prior to setting the matter on the agenda for approval Tuesday.

And we still find it odd in an era of furloughs, pay cuts and wage freezes, with private pensions being slashed and benefits in the public sector under greater scrutiny, that any team of negotiators would even consider presenting to public board a package laden with increases.

In addition, all of us are under mandatory water conservation orders while water rates for what we do use increase. (Metropolitan's 21.5 percent rate increase on its member-agencies Sept. 1 is trickling down to all of us in one fashion or another. And Metropolitan has already stated its rates will rise another 19 percent in January 2011.)

Metropolitan's largest customer is the San Diego County Water Authority, which supplies water to its North County member-entities. Riverside County's Western Municipal Water District and Eastern Municipal Water District fulfill a similar role for Southwest County. All three have members on Metropolitan's board.

Contact them; contact Metropolitan's board offices ---- we now have more time to speak out.

Let them know how you enjoy paying more for less ... while they debate enriching Metropolitan employees' lives.

Contact your representatives

Metropolitan Water District board: http://www.mwdh2o.org/mwdh2o/pages/board/bio01.html 213-217-6000

San Diego County Water Authority: http://www.sdcwa.org 858-522-6600

Eastern Municipal Water District: http://www.emwd.org 951-928-3777

Western Municipal Water District: http://www.wmwd.com 951-789-5000

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