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Execs pitching sweetened public pensions would gain the most

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The top executive at the mighty **Metropolitan Water District of Southern California** has argued that a controversial new contract for his workers - which would hike pensions **25 percent**, and raise pay up to **23 percent** - would leave Met stronger, financially, than it is right now.

That's clearly a matter for debate - so much so that Met yanked the contract off its September agenda when it became clear it might not pass. (It's now slated for an October vote, with a workshop for inquiring minds at 10 a.m. Sept. 29 in the board room at Met's **Union Station** headquarters).

But what *is* clear is that top Met executives - who have been negotiating the deal with the unions, and trying to sell it to Met's giant board of directors - will benefit most from the pension spike, in a pure dollars-and-cents sort of way.

Take, for example, General Manager **Jeff Kightlinger** (above)**.** He earns **$276,000** a year, is **50** years old, and has been with Met for **14 years**.

Let's say that Kightlinger works another **five** years - until he's **55** - and his salary goes up to **$290,000** (a conservative and reasonable assumption).

- *Without* the proposed increase, he'd take home a pension of about **$110,000** a year, every year, until the day he dies. (That's some **$2.6 million**, if he lives the expected **24 years**).
- *With* the proposed increase, he'd take home a pension of about **$138,000** a year, every year, until he dies (That's some **$3.3 million,** if he lives the expected **24 years**).

The numbers would be more dramatic for other Met exes, who have been with the giant water importer for much longer than Kightlinger. We've asked Met to provide list of all the Met employees with **20 years** or more of service, along with job titles and current salaries. We'll flesh things out when we get it.

You might want to take a look at the calculations of our former colleague, **Chris Reed**, who's now with the **San Diego Union-Tribune.** Reed uses different assumptions than we did, and different numbers, but arrives at the same conclusion: "All the MWD execs from Kightlinger on down stand to benefit greatly from the pension spike they call a great deal."

The sweetened pensions would cost Met about **$70 million** over their life, at a time when Met's pension investments are already down some **$400 million**.

Met quenches the thirst of **19 million** desert-dwelling Southern Californians. It is governed by a **37-member** board of directors. Those directors are appointed by its **26 member** agencies - the cities and water districts of **Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Diego** and **Ventura** counties.

Those cities and water districts buy imported water from Met, and then sell it to you. Met's water rates will have leaped **31 percent** by next year. The rate hikes are not related to the proposed pay and pension hikes, officials say;
Met's massive infrastructure means most of its spending is there, as opposed to personnel.

We'll be taking our spin through Met's budget soon. Stay tuned.