

# Deputies, fairness and the \$15 minimum wage

BY ROBERT A. LOVINGOOD

Imagine being twenty-something and considering your career options.

You'd weigh a wide variety of factors, including compensation and working conditions. It only makes sense that jobs requiring working weekends and graveyard shifts would pay a little more. And highly stressful jobs, would likewise pay more. And even more for careers that require being in top physical condition, split-second decision-making and have serious legal, even life-and-death implications. And what if the job regularly exposed you to the possibility of lawsuits, infectious diseases, physical assaults – and even the risk of being shot?

What kind of compensation package would you expect for a job like that? How about \$26.52 an hour?

Well that's the starting pay for an entry-level Deputy Sheriff in San Bernardino County. Considering that California's minimum wage is headed to \$15 an hour, it's no surprise that our Sheriff's Department goes far and wide, including out of state, to recruit new Deputy Sheriffs.

Back in 2009 during the recession, Sheriff's Deputies delayed a negotiated 2 percent salary increase until 2010 as well as another increase. Deputies also agreed to a concession that reduced all step increases from 5 percent to 2.5 percent plus no across-the board increases from 2012 to 2016.

My colleagues on the Board of Supervisors and I have been fiscally prudent. In the current budget, we established a 14-percent rainy-day reserve. We addressed pension obligations. And we passed a balanced budget that is \$165.2 million smaller than the previous budget. So while we need to continue to be financially responsible, we also need to be fair, especially to the very Deputies who agreed to repeated concessions just a few years ago.

In addition, employers around the country are starting to face the demographic reality that 80 million Baby Boomers will be retiring in the next decade or so. And they'll be replaced by an estimated 62 million millennials, creating a significant labor shortage. Major employers including Fortune 500 companies such as Walmart and Target last year started raising wages to be more competitive and retain their workforce. And San Bernardino is not immune to this trend.

Currently County negotiators and the Deputies association are at an impasse on a new contract. Like those who serve in the military, we can't afford what Sheriff's Deputies are really worth. But we need to break the impasse, and I believe that we can do better to ensure that compensation is fair for both Deputies and taxpayers.

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