CONTRA COSTA TIMES

Lisa Vorderbrueggen: Sheriff, DA lock horns with supervisors

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IN SO MANY WORDS, the Contra Costa sheriff and district attorney are telling the county board of supervisors to shove their budget where the sun don't shine.

Sheriff David Livingston and District Attorney Mark Peterson, both elected to their first terms last year, refuse to send to the county administrator a list of the people and positions the men would eliminate in order to meet their 2011-2012 budget numbers.

In response, the supervisors say they'll make the cuts themselves if the sheriff and district attorney fail to comply.

"I have the utmost respect for the district attorney and sheriff, but we need to approve a budget and we will approve a budget," a stern Supervisor Federal Glover, of Pittsburg, told them.

Livingston and Peterson are staring down excruciating staff cutbacks in the first budgets of their new jobs. The showdown between the county's freshly elected top cops and the five county supervisors was probably inevitable.

The lawmen agree the board may set their overall budgets but say the supervisors cannot legally dictate how they spend the money or assign personnel.

"What I will not do, and cannot do, is cede the constitutional powers that the voters vested in me when they elected me to protect them and their families," Peterson wrote in a biting letter to the board.

The county's legal team disagrees. Only the board of supervisors may adopt a budget, order layoffs, and

create or eliminate positions within all county departments.

Supervisors insist they will do whatever the sheriff and district attorney advise but the lawmen must put it in writing, which will allow the board to adopt the official budget and staffing resolutions June 7.

The process resembles a circular firing squad, but in fact, the county adopts a budget under this system every year.

So, what's really behind the district attorney and the sheriff's contrary stances?

"I think they want to be seen as advocates for their agencies, both with their employees and the public," said Supervisor John Gioia, of Richmond. "My sense is that they don't support the cuts to their departments and they think it's a way for them to make a political statement about the importance of their services."

The elephant in the budget, of course, is the supervisors' quest for union concessions.

The sheriff and district attorney could avert all or most of the personnel cuts if their employees agreed to wage reductions and paid more toward their pensions, supervisors say. Contract negotiations are under way but a resolution could take months.

In the meantime, if the lawmen fail to produce the contested list, supervisors say they will drop 34 deputy sheriffs from the payroll as of June 30; about a third of the jobs are vacant. Peterson will lose a



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It's unclear what will happen if Peterson and Livingston stick to their guns.

But if they do, this budget will become a lot more interesting.

A DEPARTURE: Central Labor Council of Contra Costa County AFL-CIO Executive Secretary-Treasurer Pam Aguilar suddenly resigned after six years on the job.

She could not be reached for comment and no one is publicly talking about why she left.

But privately, sources say Aguilar suffered health problems and neglected the council's financial records. She did not benefit personally, but the botched books have reportedly put the nonprofit group in hot water with the IRS.

Public signs of trouble emerged last year when the Fair Political Practices Commission fined Aguilar \$2,400 for failing to submit since 2007 campaign statements for the group's political action committee. At the time, she said she filed the reports but failed to verify they had been received.

The Martinez-based council told its 75 union affiliates in a May 3 letter that it appointed three board members to oversee the office until it could hire a replacement.

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TAXING MATTERS: With all of Contra Costa's money troubles, one might expect to see Gioia jumping up and down with enthusiasm over Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg's new tax bill.

The legislation would allow counties and school districts to place before voters a host of new taxes currently restricted to the state, including personal income, booze, cigarettes, oil drilling, sugary drinks and pot.

Gioia is unimpressed.

"It's a good idea to give local government broader flexibility to raise money locally," he said. "But including taxes like the personal income tax will color the whole thing." 4773) i passes be will be not bargared he life grzesp. ഉഗ്ന, IBABuzz.com/politics or Twitter. com/lvorderbrueggen.

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