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## **POLICE OFFICER RAISES: Young, county at odds**

### **Commissioners question proposal for 10 percent pay increase**

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Sheriff Bill Young proposed a contract with the police union last week that would assure most officers a 10 percent annual raise, Clark County officials said Tuesday.

By increasing costs, county officials said, the proposal would reduce the number of officers the department can hire with newly generated sales-tax revenue.

Consumers began paying a higher sales tax last week to hire hundreds of police officers.

"We need to be good fiscal stewards and make sure the new tax money is used to hire more officers and is not used to give existing officers more than a reasonable compensation," said Clark County Commissioner Chip Maxfield.

The proposal would require the Metropolitan Police Department to pay for rate increases of 10 percent and 20 percent annually in officers' health coverage, a 1.75 percent hike in employees' pension rates, and higher uniform and gun allowances for officers.

A two-page memo, prepared by county administrators late last week for the County Commission accuses police administrators of hijacking the closed-door contract negotiations with the Las Vegas Police Protective Association and questions whether county and city of Las Vegas officials endorsed the contract proposal as the sheriff's staff believed they did.

County commissioners said Tuesday that they're stunned that the sheriff is moving forward with the proposal without first addressing the county's concerns about its cost or meeting the county's demand that a third-party mediator decide the terms of the four-year contract.

"I am surprised and disappointed that this is where it is," Commission Chairman Rory Reid said. "It's not clear to me that this (proposal) was approved by the Fiscal Affairs Committee, and it's not clear to me what ability the county has to have its voice heard. If the agency (the county) that funds 70 percent of

Metro's budget doesn't have a voice in the process, there is something wrong with the process."

County Manager Thom Reilly said county staff hasn't analyzed how much the contract proposal would cost the county over four years, but the county and Las Vegas police agree the proposal would increase the overall cost of police salaries and benefits by more than 25 percent.

By comparison, the increased cost of the last four-year police contract was 17 percent, according to the county memo. Also, the city of Las Vegas' most recent contract with its firefighters increased those costs by 17 percent, and the current contract between the county and its firefighters increased those costs by 15 percent, according to the memo.

"We are concerned about the magnitude of the four-year increase and the precedent that it would set when we enter into contract negotiations with other county labor unions in January," Reilly said Tuesday.

The sheriff was out of town and unavailable for comment Tuesday. Undersheriff Douglas Gillespie said the proposed contract is not excessive and that the department is moving ahead with the proposal despite the county's objections.

Gillespie said he received authorization to move ahead with the contract proposal Sept. 26 at a meeting of the Metropolitan Police Committee on Fiscal Affairs, a five-member, budget-oversight committee made up of two county commissioners, two members of the Las Vegas City Council and one citizen representative.

The committee members present didn't vote on the proposal because officials are prohibited from voting during private meetings. But Gillespie left that meeting with the understanding that a majority of the members supported the proposed contract even though county administrators opposed it, he said.

The undersheriff also noted that the Fiscal Affairs Committee has the authority to approve the contract when the committee meets on Oct. 24.

"It wasn't unanimous, but the majority of them (on Fiscal Affairs) gave direction to me to take that proposal back to the Police Protective Association (police union) and work toward an agreement," Gillespie said. "Why would the contract negotiations stop based on what a county staff person says the county staff can't support?"

Reid and Maxfield, who serves on the Fiscal Affairs Committee, said county administrators are exploring whether the county can intercede in the contract talks before the Fiscal Affairs Committee considers the proposal.

Meanwhile, the Police Protective Association in the past week notified officers of the proposal's terms and scheduled a vote on the contract between Oct. 17 and the Oct. 24 Fiscal Affairs meeting.

"Before this (contract proposal) goes back to Fiscal Affairs for any action, there needs to be serious consideration given to the county's concerns," Maxfield said.

The contract calls for the officers to receive a 3.5 percent cost-of-living raise in the first year of the contract, which is retroactive to July 1. In the second through fourth years of the contract, officers would receive annual 4.5 percent cost-of-living raises, according to union literature.

The pact would also require the department to pay for a 1.75 percent hike in the officers' contribution toward their pension, and annual increases in health coverage of 10 percent in the first year and 20 percent in the subsequent years of the contract.

When a 4.5 percent cost-of-living raise and a 1.75 percent payment to each officer's pension are added to the 4 percent "merit" or "step" raise that most officers are entitled to receive each year, an officer is in line to receive a 10 percent annual raise based on the contract proposal, according to the county memo.

Las Vegas' police salaries on Tuesday ranked 57th-highest among the nation's 200 largest police departments, according to [policepay.net](http://policepay.net), an organization that reviews police salaries and benefits.

Earlier this year, before police departments around the country approved new contracts with their officers, the Las Vegas, North Las Vegas and Henderson police departments had salaries that ranked in the top 10 among the 200 cities.

The entry-level salary for a Las Vegas police officer is \$44,695, according to [policepay.net](http://policepay.net).

The 10 percent increases that most officers would receive under the contract would boost the entry-level salary to \$49,164 the first year, based on calculations by the Review-Journal. That would rise to \$54,080 during the contract's second year, \$59,488 in the third year and \$65,436 in the fourth year of the pact.

After reading the county's memo about the contract proposal, Carole Vilardo, president of the Nevada Taxpayers Association, and Steve Frates, senior fellow at the Rose Institute of State and Local Government at Claremont-McKenna College in Claremont, Calif., said it's imperative that the contract proposal be discussed publicly before it moves forward.

"This should go before the county and the city because you have future impacts to those budgets," Vilardo said. "To have this information go to them after the fact ... is fiscally irresponsible and does not establish the fiduciary responsibility between the elected officials (on the City Council and County Commission) and the taxpayers."

Both also said county and police department officials should provide more information on the future impact the proposal will have on the budgets of the city and county.

A generous salary and benefits package, they both said, would limit the number of officers that can be hired.

"Every dollar that is spent on increasing the salary and benefits is a dollar that won't be spent hiring new officers," Frates said.

Henderson retiree Donald McDonald, who co-authored the November ballot argument opposing a sales-tax hike to pay for more officers, said the contract proposal is unreasonable, especially since the taxpayers paying for it receive far smaller pay hikes in the private sector.

He said the sheriff seems more interested in helping his police officers than in spending taxpayer money wisely.

"The sheriff should be held responsible for this proposal. He's the front-line manager for all the Metro officers. They work for him," McDonald said. "He is more of an advocate for the police union than he is a negotiator for the taxpayers and the County Commission."

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