

RANCHO SANTA MARGARITA

The best cure for bloated pensions

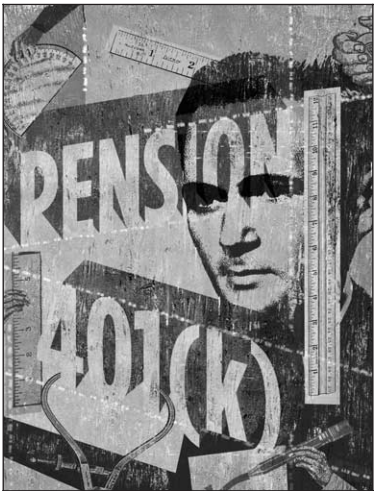
The change in the Rancho Santa Margarita city worker retirement plan fails in one important area [“City adopts 2-tier pension system,” Local, Jan. 24]. The “new” plan plans less retirement for workers hired in the future; however, until the city bases all retirement plans on base salary or earnings we will not see much savings.

Many retirements are based on the last year or the last three years’ earnings, including overtime. Over the years employees have worked all the overtime they could to jack up their retirements to much higher than their normal year’s wages. Until this base-pay provision is replaced, taxpayers will still lose on the retirement packages.

If Jerry Brown truly wanted to reform California’s retirement “mess,” that is the only thing that will work. Do not negotiate with any state unions. Just do it: a set percentage for years of service based only on base pay. No bonuses and no overtime.

J.D. Tone
Fountain Valley
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I’m a fan of Teri Sforza and especially enjoyed her column about RSM city pension reform. The city has taken a good first step, but if RSM is serious about saving taxpayer money, it should have made the reduction in benefits apply to future service of current employees, too. By leaving current employees unaffected, it’s like they’re pulling up the ladder behind them.



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The changes they adopted will only save money if and when they have employee turnover. If the same half-percent reduction in the benefit accrual rate were applied to all future service of current employees, they would save a bundle even if they have no turnover.

Furthermore, why should two employees accrue different benefits for current service just because one was hired before another? Some would argue, “That’s not fair. You can’t change someone’s pension formula after they’re hired.” I say, why not? There is no guarantee of their pay (across-the-board pay cuts sometimes happen). There is no guarantee that they’ll even have a job (layoffs happen).

Why should pension benefit accrual rates be protected?
Bill Hezzelwood
San Clemente

Dana Point’s dubious medical marijuana busts

I am feeling tremendous anxiety about our city of Dana Point working so hard to close all the medical marijuana collectives without so much as a survey or series of public hearings. After all, the city is trying to nullify the votes of millions of Californians.

It is not a whim for the city to decide alone. The city’s statement, which claims that this action “had nothing to do with marijuana,” is dubious to say the least. I wonder how many other types of facilities were recently targeted under the same supposed code violations.

As elected representatives they are bound by common sense to poll the constituency before action, especially if their actions run contrary to the majority vote of Californians for medical marijuana. I am extremely uncomfortable with being a part of a city that would deny a suffering person a measure of relief due to a potential for abuse by minors and opportunists. This penchant for abuse exists in alcohol and prescription drugs as well as over-the-counter concoctions.

In addition, the city is opening itself up to additional needless expense defending against lawsuits that it will surely face on the issue.

Susan R. Rouse
Dana Point

AIRPORT CONCESSIONS ARE SECONDARY

Those of us who pay for John Wayne Airport’s half-billion dollar expansion and

new third terminal – with our \$4.50 per ticket passenger facilities tax – are waiting for news of better airline service. Instead, we get one more article about airport food [“O.C. to settle JWA fast-food duke out,” Jan. 22]. Meanwhile, the number of nonstop destinations being served from John Wayne has dropped from 25 in 2005 to only 19 today.

We go to airports because we want to fly. We are forced to go to Long Beach Airport or LAX because JWA does not offer nonstop flights to Washington, D.C., Florida, New England, Cabo San Lucas or popular ski areas like Mammoth. We eat our breakfast burritos at other area airports so it matters less who gets the food concessions at JWA.

Leonard Kranser
Dana Point

SHORT MEMORY ON SHERIFF’S HARASSMENT

A Register editorial says, “Though the cloud has been lifted from the Sheriff’s Department.” This just shows the

short memory of the editorial staff [“Carona behind bars,” Jan. 25].

The subtitle to your editorial (“Sheriff’s Department regains public trust”) is also bogus. The cloud of public mistrust still hangs over the Sheriff’s Department under Sheriff Sandra Hutchens like the stink of a skunk run over by a deputy on patrol.

To bring the editorial staff up to date, simply reread the verbiage of former editorial writer Steven Greenhut. For starters, how about spying on the Board of Supervisors, refusal to turn over the videotapes, deputies harassing citizens during the concealed weapons debate, an out-of-control deputy in South County still on duty and the ubiquitous “code of silence”?

It’s too bad the Register has decided to abdicate its responsibilities as the Fourth Estate and turn a blind eye to Hutchens’ Gestapo.

James H. McGee
Orange

BLOGWATCH: EYEWITNESSES TO HISTORY

From Letters Editor, **Betty Talbert**: Have you ever thought about how letters to the editor are eyewitnesses to history? Pulitzer Prize-winning biography writer David McCullough

describes history as “... a guide to navigation in perilous times. History is who we are and why we are the way we are.”

Letters and opinion writing are forms of primary source and eyewitness documentation. Reading these letters tells us what various segments of a newspapers’ readership think at any given time as its members try to make sense of historic events and “perilous times.”

So if letters are indeed in some sense “history,” how can this knowledge help you better craft your letter?

- More careful research and factual accuracy in how you portray your views and the views of others serves your immediate audience and helps those who will look back on these events.
- Use easily documentable primary sources for quotes by subjects you critique found in contemporary news accounts and TV interviews.
- Giving a few broad strokes of event context can clarify the time period of events well as the issues for readers in the future. ... In this Internet age what you write may be immortalized on the Web for future generations to peruse, so make it easy for them to understand it.
- Remember, when you write a letter you are going on record for someone else to quote. Your reputation is on the line, which is a good incentive for you to get it right ...

See more writing tips, blogs, reader cartoons and letters to the editor at letters.ocregister.com or www.ocregister.com/opinion

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