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**SECTION:** OPINION**LENGTH:** 533 words**HEADLINE:** **Unaffordable outcomes;**

L.A. County pensions: Ridiculous, shameful, amazing, bankrupting.

**BODY:**

Not long ago we learned that the all-time highest-paid employee of L.A. County, a physician, made \$295,000 last year, including overtime. Now we can tell you that 1,198 retired L.A. County employees are collecting \$100,000 a year or more, and the biggest pension for a retired county employee is \$316,047.

What we can't tell you, dear taxpayer, even though you are paying the bills, is who these people are. The L.A. County Employees Retirement Association released the salary and pension information only after the L.A. Daily News pursued it under the state Public Records Act, yet refused to provide any names.

That's a highly dubious legal position. But the numbers are plenty revealing, and indefensible.

"Ridiculous" is what they are, says Steven B. Frates, a senior fellow at the Rose Institute of State and Local Government at Claremont McKenna College. These retirees are living as if they each had millions of dollars, because that is what it would take for anyone to generate that kind of cash.

"Ashamed" is how we should feel about encumbering our children and grandchildren, says Jon Coupal, president of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association. Also, these pensions take away from basic operational expenses, such as police and fire protection.

"Amazing," says Sheriff's Sgt. Patrick Gomez, president of the L.A. County Professional Peace Officers Association. He says he'd like to see that kind of money for his union members.

"Bankruptcy" will be the end result, says state Sen. Tom McClintock, R-Thousand Oaks. Giveaways like these are handed out to special-interest groups because politicians want to ingratiate themselves and defer the cost as far as possible into the future.

An even greater challenge, according to L.A. County's Chief Administrative Officer David Jansen, will be paying for county retirees' health care. The county agreed a decade ago to pick up all those costs, and the costs are soaring.

Don't assume, by the way, that all county workers have fat pensions. Mark Tarnowsky, spokesman for the Service Employees International Union Local 660, which represents 50,000 county workers, says the average nonsafety retiree gets \$2,100 a month.

Does anybody defend the big payouts, other than the beneficiaries? Nobody we know. And the story is similar whether in Sacramento, where the state pension program costs \$300 for an average family [whose members likely don't have a pension], or in Long Beach, where politicians went for an even juicier plan than most cities and counties, despite a deepening financial hole.

What's next? Politicians, afraid to raise taxes, will try to get voters to approve special- purpose ballot measures, such as L.A. County's proposed half-cent sales-tax increase to pay for police and fire protection [which should be covered by available funds].

As for Long Beach's budget shortfall, if the City Council sticks to the recently revised three-year strategic budget, the city can dig its way out of the worst problems. The alternative, there and in other local governments, is to watch local governments begin to collapse under their own weight.

That is the one outcome we truly cannot afford.

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