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Amid Mystery Over His Severance & Future Of His Confederates, Hernandez Quits

Leonard Hernandez, the librarian who vaulted to the top of San Bernardino County's governmental chain of command and reigned for close to three years as one of the most feared and dominating personages in the county's 170-year history, has resigned from his \$599,400.55 total annual compensation post.

Hernandez's once-untouchable administration imploded in scandal



Leonard Hernandez

over a compacted period of less than three weeks' duration while he was out of the office on vacation earlier this summer.

The progression toward his demise, however, had been brewing for some time, as the personality traits that had allowed him to take such dynamic charge of the county governmental apparatus and left so many literally quaking in his presence ultimately engendered a seemingly spontaneously concerted resistance to the continuation of his autocracy.

His departure, nonetheless, has raised a num-

ber of questions about what arrangements were made to effectuate his leaving and the fate of a cabal of assistant and deputy administrators and department heads he installed in the county's executive suite to assist him in his preeminence over the county.

Hernandez was a 20-year-old student at California State University in Fullerton when he originally went to work for the county in 1998

reshelving books at the Chino branch library. After obtaining a history degree, he began working for the county library system full time, simultaneously pursuing his master's degree in library science through Clarion University's online learning program and promoting into the position of the Fontana Branch Library manager. In 2008, he jumped at the opportunity to become the di- See P 8

Ontario Council/Manager Lovefest Belies Unresolved Water Fund Diversion Issue

In an effort to avert what some were predicting would soon manifest into a managerial disaster and public funding misdirection/diversion scandal and public relations nightmare, the Ontario City Council this week made a public show of appreciation toward City Manager Scott Ochoa, a little more than five-and-a-half years af-

ter he arrived in the city.

Ochoa had gone for more than three years without a substantive raise, even as the city council was conducting multiple reviews of his performance while city operations were expanding and complexifying in parallel with a massive increase in the city's finances.

In October 2017,

Ochoa, then the city manager of 203,054-population Glendale, had been lured to 172,996-population Ontario to serve as city manager. Ontario offered him a roughly \$45,000 raise over the \$274,901 annual salary Glendale was then paying him along with some benefit enhancements.

Ochoa made an earnest effort to fit in and

made no waves during the first two to two-and-a-half years of his tenure in Ontario.

Nevertheless, there were elements of the situation Ochoa had walked into in Ontario about which he had no inkling when he signed on for the city manager assignment which would turn out to be highly problematic for him per-

sonally. Among those were the venal motivations and deep-seated personality flaws of several of his political masters on the city council, the accompanying accommodations throughout the municipal structure that had been made over the years and a lack of financial discipline that had beset the city.

Hands down, See P 2

In Hesperia Impatience Mounts Over Languishing Animal Shelter

What have been characterized as long-existent serious problems at the City of Hesperia's animal shelter have grown even worse in recent weeks, individuals with access to the facility have told the *Sentinel*.

Those conditions are so bad that the city has instituted measures to prevent citizens or outsiders from coming into

the facility in an effort to prevent the public at large from seeing the deteriorating conditions. Nevertheless, photographs that appear to document the accounts of abuse and neglect have been taken and made available to the *Sentinel* and other media outlets.

The untoward condition of the shelter was a talked-about See P 3

Fontana Police Gun Down Drunk Los Angeles County Sheriff's Deputy At The Sierra Lakes Golf Club

A heavily intoxicated off-duty Los Angeles County sheriff's deputy was killed by a fusillade of bullets fired from the guns of at least four Fontana police officers on the grounds of the Sierra Lakes golf course Tuesday afternoon.

Alejandro Diaz, 45, a 19-year Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department veteran and resi-

dent of the north Fontana neighborhood immediately adjacent to the Sierra Lakes golf course, discharged his gun inside the home he shared with his family in the 16600 block of Colonial Drive around 3:50 p.m. August 15.

Diaz, who was visibly upset, then left his house. At least two members of his family attempted to

restrain him and pull him back into the house's garage, at which point the three of them tripped or fell on the driveway. Diaz got to his feet and continued walking toward the golf course.

A call came into the Fontana Police Department's dispatch center at 3:55 p.m. from Diaz's wife, who related that her husband had See P 3

National Park Service Elevates Jane Rodgers To Joshua Tree Monument Superintendent

The National Park Service has selected Jane Rodgers to serve as the superintendent of Joshua Tree National Park.

She began as the head honcho of 140-employee park staff on August 13.

Rodgers is a 1990 graduate of the University of California, Berkeley. She obtained a Bachelor of Science degree in forestry there before she joined the U.S. Peace

Corps and was posted to the Republic of Niger.

After having returned stateside, in January 1994 Rodgers went to work for the National Park Service, specializing in restoration ecology and landscape-scale conservation. From 1994 to 2003, she worked as a biologist at Joshua Tree National Park. From February 2003 until October 2008, she was an



Jane Rodgers

ecologist at Point Reyes National Seashore. She was the deputy chief for science and resource

management at Grand Canyon National Park from October 2008 until October 2016.

She returned to Joshua Tree in October 2016 as the chief of science and resource stewardship, remaining in that post until February, when she was made the acting superintendent upon Superintendent David Smith's departure. Rodgers lives proximate to the Nation-

al Park headquarters in Twentynine Palms with her wife, Kate Peterlein.

Rodgers said she was conscious that she was being privileged to serve as the park's first woman superintendent.

"With the park's leadership team, I am looking toward further meaningful exchange and communication with the 15 Serrano, Chemehuevi and Ca- See P 3

Upholding Of Measure K Raises Question Over Whether Supervisors Will Refund \$380K In Unauthorized Remuneration

The California Supreme Court's decision to let the Fourth District Court of Appeals' ruling upholding 2020's Measure K stand raises a question over whether current and past members of the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors will be required to refund some \$380,000 each they have been paid in excess of what the political reform initiative specified.

In the November 2020 election, a supermajority of San Bernardino County's voters approved Measure K, which was sponsored by the government reform advocacy coalition the Red Brennan Group. The measure called for deeming the county's five supervisors part-time legislators and reducing the individual total annual compensation of each to \$60,000 from, depending on the number of their familial dependents covered under their benefit plans, a range between \$242,941.27 to \$280,905.92 annually. Measure K further limited the supervisors to a single four-year term. It passed by a more than two-thirds margin, with 516,184 votes or 66.84 percent in favor to 256,098 or 33.16 percent in opposition.

The county, using its office of county counsel, retained three attorneys – Bradley Hertz, James Sutton and Nicholas Sanders of the Los Angeles-based Sutton Law Firm – and au- See P 2

To Delay The Imposition Of Measure K's Reforms, County Supervisors Challenged It In Court *from front page*

thorized them to sue in San Bernardino County Superior Court the supervisors' own immediate employee, Clerk of the Board of Supervisors Lynna Monell, in a legal petition to keep her from implementing Measure K. Then-County Counsel Michelle Blakemore and San Bernardino County Chief Executive Officer Leonard Hernandez arranged to have the lawsuit maneuvered into the courtroom of Superior Court Judge Don Alvarez, who was known to be both beholden and sympathetic to the county's governmental

hierarchy. The filing of the lawsuit put Measure K into abeyance while it was subject to legal challenge, preventing the salary reductions from going into effect until such time as the matter was adjudicated. Judge Alvarez made a finding invalidating the entirety of Measure K on the grounds that its secondary provision limiting supervisors to a single four-year term was unconstitutional and that the term limitation element of the measure was not separable from its salary and benefit reductions. This, Judge Alvarez ruled, rendered Measure K unenforceable.

The Red Brennan Group, appealed Alvarez's finding and obtained a ruling from the 4th District Court of Ap-

peal in the summer of 2022 reversing his invalidation of the measure. But the lawsuit challenging Measure K bought the board of supervisors two years of time, during which the county government placed on the November 2022 ballot what it represented as its own government reform initiative, Measure D, which restored each individual supervisor's total annual compensation to roughly \$255,000 to \$275,000 – roughly 80 percent of what is provided to a Superior Court judge – while imposing on the supervisors term limits of three four-year terms, essentially equivalent to what had been the wage-scale and number-of-years-in-office rules that had been in place before Measure

K's passage. Measure D passed by a margin of 241,894 votes or 58.22 percent to 173,582 votes or 41.78 percent in the November 2022 election.

In the meantime, the county lodged an appeal of the 4th District Court of Appeal's ruling validating Measure K.

By convincing the county's voters to re-establish their roughly quarter of a million-dollar total compensation packages with the passage of 2022's Measure D, the board of supervisors hoped that they would never be subject to the substantial reduction in pay and benefits that had been mandated by Measure K. There is a pressing legal question, however, as to whether the board members can simply elude the voter

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As San Bernardino County's Wealthiest City, Ontario Is Also Its Least Financially Disciplined *from front page*

Ontario is San Bernardino County's wealthiest municipality. For a variety of reasons – historical, geographical, jurisdictional, administrative and plain serendipitous, Ontario has for the last three decades and more had revenue that dwarfs that of every other city in the county and roughly double to that of the second best financially-fixed of the other 23 cities and incorporated towns. Ontario had annually budgeted for some of its single departments – the police department and fire department among them – more money than some of San Bernardino County's cities and towns used for the entirety of their operations in a single year. With that wealth came, inevitably, a lack of financial discipline. Expenditure comparisons demonstrate that Ontario, in many or almost all cases, for years and yet today, pays more for certain things, its employees among them, than does virtually every other city or town in the county. A

recurrent gripe of local elected officials in San Bernardino County outside of Ontario is that they must compete against Ontario in the public employee remuneration sweepstakes. They need to, those officials say, expend ever greater amounts of money in terms of employee salaries and benefits to simply retain what established and trained employees they have, or those employees will leave when Ontario has a vacancy for a like position.

A factor in that reality, just as much as Ontario's greater financial resources, is the vulnerability of Ontario's political leadership to those in the know – in the know about the political corruption, backroom maneuvering, patronage in which city contracts are awarded to those providing those politicians with campaign donations or kickbacks, the favors that are given and how they are delivered. Those in the know include city officials and employees at the highest and even medium levels. Their silence has been purchased by salary increases, benefit enhancements and perquisites, some of which are creatively derived. To keep that hush money from becoming obvi-

ous, employees down the chain of command in Ontario, virtually all of them, have been given pay raises that make them the envy of their counterparts in other Inland Valley cities.

As Ochoa settled more fully into the role of city manager he began to take stock of the appalling lack of fiscal discipline within the city, the projects or programs which, while deserving and worth pursuing, were overfunded, and the complete lack of effort with regard to other needs in the city, circumstances or situations left unaddressed because the city either did not have the money to redress them or had prioritized money elsewhere, sometimes for far less critical needs.

It was out of the question, however, for Ochoa to so much as contemplate an across-the-board overhaul of the manner in which Ontario was run. Such a reform effort would result in his immediate termination as city manager, if not his arrest and potential prosecution, given the political connections and reach of the city council. Whatever reform effort he was to undertake, Ochoa recognized, would have to be measured. Also, he understood, it could not be

undertaken with any sort of fanfare or publicity, as doing so might cast the mayor and council members in a poor light when questions were asked about how it was that the underlying practices being redressed had been allowed to go on for so long.

One depredation layered into Ontario's municipal operations for nearly a decade by the time Ochoa arrived in the city that had become institutionalized was the city's looting of its water fund.

Cities keep separate and independent accounts for their general funds, defined as cities' general operating accounts, and their so-called special purpose funds. Special purpose funds include enterprise funds such as water, sewer or sanitation funds, which are used to operate a given city's utility divisions which provide, i.e., sell, services to that city's residents. In California, under state law and the State Constitution as well as the California Municipal Utility District Act, cities are restricted from turning a profit on the provision of public utility services but must charge no more than the reasonable amount required to acquire the commodity such as water or electric-

mandates that were imposed upon them. That question is even more pointed now that the California Supreme Court has upheld Measure K and the salary, benefits and term limits it embodied.

Of relevance is when, precisely, the measures – both K and D – went into effect.

In the run-up to the 2020 election, the board of supervisors was composed of First Dis-

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ity being delivered or provide the service such as sewage handling or trash disposal residents require along with the cost of maintaining the infrastructure, appurtenances and the system involved in the delivery of the service.

Modern accounting standards have developed such that local governments have the ability to and are obliged to keep all of their varying funds – from the general fund to the water fund to the sewer fund to the electrical utility fund to gas tax funds passed along by the state to revenue enhancement funds obtained from voter-passed measures for specific purposes to state or federal grant funds to funds obtained from services rendered to the public to internal funds to asset seizure funds to money used for internal city services dedicated to special policing, special fire protection and suppression, the operation and maintenance of flood and storm protection, specialized recreational programs, special library, special museum and special cultural facility services, the maintenance of parks, the maintenance of parkways, the maintenance of open spaces or facilities in specific neighborhoods or districts sup-

ported by levies of fees exclusively applied in those subareas of the city, also known as community facilities districts – in separate and sequestered accounts. In Ontario, which owns and operates an international airport, the number of funds it oversees is substantially greater than virtually all other cities in San Bernardino County. The accounting functions and accounting mechanisms are therefore more sophisticated and more convoluted.

Interplay among and between a local government's different funds are not absolutely prohibited and can take place with certain limitations that are meant to ensure the ultimate integrity of the funds. Loans from one fund to another can be made and sustained as long as the department of the city doing the loaning has the available financial resources within its fund or funds and does not have any immediate need to make use of that money and the department using the money needs the money and will have, or prospectively has, the ability in the future to pay the money back. Generally speaking, those loans are made at an interest

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San Bernardino County CEO Hernandez's Mistress Seeking Whistleblower Protection

By Mark Gutglueck

(August 16) Pam Williams, San Bernardino County Chief Executive Officer Leonard Hernandez's mistress whom he installed into the \$266,612.23-total annual compensation position of chief of county administration, is now asking the county to grant her whistleblower protection in the aftermath of their office-shattering breakup.

Hernandez was serving as the county librarian when in 2015 he was plucked by then-County Chief Executive Officer Greg Devereaux to serve as a deputy county executive officer overseeing



Pam Williams

the county's libraries, its museum, the registrar of voters office, county airports and its agriculture and weights and measures division. His rise continued in 2017 when he was entrusted with the assignment of county chief operating officer. In September

2020, he was promoted to the county's top staff position, chief executive officer. Almost immediately upon moving officially into the CEO post in October 2020, Hernandez chose Williams, then a principal administrative analyst, to serve as the county's chief of administration and head of what was termed its strategic initiatives division. In making that promotion, Hernandez advanced Williams by the equivalent of 17 pay grades. In short order, Hernandez, who had already demonstrated his aggressiveness and ambition by his single-minded devotion

to carrying out the stated or implied imperatives of his political masters on the board of supervisors, established what has arguably been the most domineering administration in San Bernardino County history. Heading county government are nine constitutional elected officials – the sheriff, district attorney, treasurer/tax collector, and assessor/recorder/clerk, all of whom are elected at large; and five supervisors elected by geographical district. In all of those areas of county governance falling under the purview of the board of supervisors and thereby his author-

ity as their administrative designee, Hernandez moved swiftly to assert his authority over the various department heads overseeing the myriad of functions and operations of county government. Hernandez lost no time in seeking, in the words of one former county employee, to make the county over into his own image. He selected members of his executive team and bench employees based on whether he considered them amenable to his methods of operating and would have those he identified for potential future leadership assignments attend leadership

training sessions to learn his philosophy and expectations, seminars likened by some to Stalinist or Maoist reeducation camps.

According to some attendees and notes found on a flip chart in one of the conference rooms after one such session was held, the acolytes were being trained in what was termed "Leonardship 101." Attendees of this leadership training revealed the main focus was on Hernandez's belief that in order to become a leader, one must first excel as a devoted follower. Followers observe and learn from

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Hesperia's Persistent Problems With Its Animal Control Division Abated A Bit With A Conscientious Manager But Returned After His 2021 Retirement *from front page*

reality as early as 2013. In 2016, the city commissioned Surprise, Arizona-based Animal Shelters Services, LLC to carry out an examination and evaluation of the shelter. Some of the conditions that Tim Crum, the chief executive officer of Animal Shelter Services, LLC and the company's other employees encountered were of such a disturbing nature that the report they generated, which was provided to the city in June 2016, was deemed confidential and an attorney/client work product so

that the city did not have to release it publicly. Instead, the glimpse the public did get of the conditions documented by Animal Shelter Services, LLC came through a staff report by the city's then-director of development services, Michael Blay, to the city council that month. The *Sentinel*, more than seven years later, has obtained a copy of the Animal Shelter Services report. Among the animal control division's shortcomings "in need of immediate remedy," according to the report, were a

lack of strong leadership, which was cited as being a significant barrier to the shelter's efficiency; a lack of general hygiene and the failure to use prompt and proper disinfecting protocols; manpower shortages within the animal control division and kennel staff such that they were "stretched far beyond any reasonable capacity to provide care to the animals;" a reduction in the live release rate of animals, which in the animal shelter/care industry is a key measurement of effectiveness; and a generally inadequate shelter facility, which included nonexistent or inadequate climate control.

The report noted that the Hesperia Animal Control facility, i.e., the

shelter, was located in a retrofitted set of office buildings that were not intended for that purpose. As such, according to Animal Shelter Services, the physical facilities were poorly laid out and in a state of disrepair.

One outcome of the report was that within a few months, the city moved to hire Donald Riser, a former San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department lieutenant who had worked with both Blay and then-City Manager Niles Bentsen when they had previously worked in the sheriff's department, as the city's animal services manager from 2016 until 2021.

According to employees and shelter volunteers, Riser did a de-

cent job organizing the animal control division into some semblance of order.

There was what ultimately proved out to be misplaced confidence that the city would come up with the roughly \$8 million to build from scratch a new animal control facility designed for that purpose. Ultimately, after indicating that the city would eventually fund the project, city officials backtracked, saying they simply did not have the funding available to construct a new shelter. The city did carry out some limited repairs and modifications, although that work did not meet the level specified in Animal Shelter Services' recommendations contained in

the report.

With Riser's 2021 retirement, according to volunteers at the facility, it declined into a state of functionality below what had been the case in 2015 and early 2016 when the Animal Shelter Services' survey and evaluation of conditions were carried out.

Photos show animals living in wretched conditions. Observers say temperatures in the kennels have typically reached or exceeded 100 degrees in recent weeks and months.

It is reported that Dr. Jaime Velasco, a veterinarian who had provided competent care for the animals, for reasons that have not been explicated, has not been *Continued on Page 18*

Fontana PD Maintains Deputy Was Reaching For What Was Thought To Be A Gun When They Blasted Him *from front page*

fired a gun at a wall inside their home. Several others called the police to report a man walking through their neighborhood with a gun in hand. As Diaz approached the country club at the golf course, he redirected himself and began running toward one of the course's links. Mul-

tiple police department units responding to the area of the golf course, and the officers spotted Diaz. Ultimately, they converged on him in the 16600 block of Clubhouse Drive, near the Sierra Lakes clubhouse.

A video with audio from a handheld device or a cell phone showed Diaz sitting on the ground propped up against a golf cart as four officers with their guns drawn approach him. In the video he can be seen momentarily raising his left hand and then dropping it as the officers gingerly approach him.

Diaz then rolled over, so he is prone on his back. He reaches out with his right hand.

"He's got it!" one of the officers is heard yelling. After less than a full second delay, a first officer fires and instantaneously the other three officers discharge their weapons. It did not appear that Diaz had fully gripped what he was reaching for nor discharged his gun.

After the shooting ended, one of the officers is heard saying, "He grabbed the gun."

"What an idiot," another officer responds.

The police department put out a statement that the police had found themselves in a no-win situation.

"After giving several verbal commands, a lethal force encounter occurred," accord-

ing to the department. "Immediately after the shooting, officers, including two technical reserve paramedics, provided advanced life-saving measures while San Bernardino County fire medics arrived and

continued medical treatment."

Diaz was transported to Kaiser Hospital in Fontana, where he was pronounced dead.

-Mark Gutglueck



Her Credentials As A Scientist & Environmentalist Qualify Rodgers For Superintendent Postion, According To The National Parks Service *from front page*

huilla tribal communities whose traditional homelands extended to this section of the Mojave," she said, referring

to the tribes and local population as "partners in the management of the park."

Joshua Tree National

Park is host to 3.1 million guests annually, including ones from within California, across the nation and international travelers.



County Wants Feds To Put Up \$30M Of \$79M To Repair 27 Aging Desert Bridges

The San Bernardino County Department of Public Works is seeking a \$30 million grant to assist it in the rehabilitation of 27 timber bridges that were constructed prior to or in the early stage of the completion of Route 66 through the Mojave Desert.

Department of Public Works Director Brendon Biggs this week was given clearance by the county board of supervisors to make a digital submission of a grant application to the United States Department of Transportation's Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant Program.

If successful, the county's reception of the money would require that it venture at least 20 percent of the estimated \$79 million cost toward completing the project.

The 27 timber bridges, all of which are of a length of no more than 20 feet, are located at various spots on the National Trails Highway, between Daggett/Yermo Road and Amboy Road. The National Trails Highway, also known as the National Old Trails Road or as the Ocean-to-Ocean Highway, was established in 1912. At

3,096 miles, it stretched from Baltimore to California. In the Southwest, it traced much of the old National Road and the Santa Fe Trail. A major portion of the road from Colorado west became Route 66 in 1926 and from Colorado east became U.S. Route 40 in 1926.

Route 66 for nearly 60 years was a primary travel route from Los Angeles to Chicago. In 1985, it was decertified as a national highway and has been supplanted in large measure by Route 40. Historic Route 66 in San Bernardino

County nevertheless remains important to both local and regional traffic circulation. The section of National Trails Highway between Daggett/Yermo Road and Amboy Road provides an alternate route when Interstate 40 experiences unanticipated emergency closures due to accidents, freeway construction, or storm events. The United States Marine Corps also utilizes National Trails Highway as a critical route for the movement of heavy equipment necessary for national defense training activities in the region. There are along

that stretch, according to Biggs, 33 bridges that are 20 feet or less in length that were constructed in the 1920s and 1930s that are now beyond their intended design life and would benefit from reconstruction to maintain public safety and the structural integrity of the roadway. Six of those bridges are being replaced with funding from the San Bernardino County Transportation Authority.

The county's public works department is requesting funding under the Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant

Program to supplement funding from the San Bernardino County Transportation Authority for the reconstruction of the other 27 bridges.

Under the terms of the Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant Program, which supplies partial funding for undertakings known as rural Surface Transportation Program projects, a minimum local match of 20% is required for the federal money to be disgorged. Similarly, a local match of 40 percent is required of the beneficiaries of Infrastructure

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Sixteen Independently-Minded Women At Or Near The Top Of The County's Administrative Structure Were Sacked, Forced Out Or Resigned Over Personality Conflicts With Hernandez Or Differences With His Leadership Approach *from page 2*

a single leader so that someday they will be able to lead, according to Hernandez. An example given was a flock of geese that has only one leader flying point. All the other geese follow, he said.

Hernandez's result-oriented approach placed a priority on his being able to demonstrate to the board of supervisors that whatever change in policy or approach was being dictated to staff could be effectuated immediately. This meant his ruthless willingness to exercise his authority and reach as chief executive officer was in equal measure contingent upon intimidation and fear. For much of the more than three years before he became chief executive officer, while he was yet in the role of the county's chief operating officer, Hernandez had curried favor with the board of supervisors by being willing to do what all of the county's top administrators before him were unwilling to do, which was to let the board of supervisors have their way or put into play the action they wanted taken without having to hold a public vote ratifying the policy they were em-

barking upon. The board at that time, in particular its then-chairman, Curt Hagman, would bypass Gary McBride, then the county's chief executive officer, and request Hernandez set things in motion. What the board members, in particular Hagman, wanted, Hernandez wanted and therefore achieved for them. Under this arrangement, the county's department heads had a simple choice: either do what Hernandez ordered them to do, whether what he was asking of them was officially approved by the board of supervisors or not, or risk being fired. When he made the transition to chief executive officer, he continued to apply that formula with further refinements.

Hernandez recruited plucky employees – in most but not all cases young men – for placement into what he referred to as “stretch assignments.” Stretch assignments consisted primarily of what were usually for those employees substantial promotions they would normally not be considered for, often in departments they had never worked in, generally passing over other more qualified and experienced individuals.

This was done, at least in part, to engender loyalty based on the gratitude and dependency of the person promoted. These young guns generally proved to reliably do as they were told, because they did not have preconceived ideas of what to do in their new executive positions. In this way they became Hernandez's faithful followers/disciples.

The creation of a cult within the county of Hernandez loyalists initially allowed the management team to reach outlined goals and achieve milestones shared by the board and Hernandez. It came at a cost, nonetheless.

One issue was that Hernandez's reach had always exceeded his grasp. His practical understanding of how government worked extended only to the departments within which he had real hands-on experience, those being the county library system and the county museum. He had, as well, a superficial understanding of the registrar of voters office, regional parks management, county airports and the county department of agriculture/weights and measures, for which he had oversight responsibility when he was the county deputy executive officer for community services for less than two years beginning in 2015. His air of authority and ability to strike fear into

those he commanded and have them carry out those commands was not matched by his depth of experience in informing the wisdom of or determining what those orders should be. Virtually his entire work history consists of being a government employee, giving him no practical knowledge of the demands of the private sector. Additionally, the breadth of his actual experience as a government employee prior to moving into top management was confined to the departments within the county community services division which had different levels of significance, priority, intensity, controversy, invasivity, authority and urgency involving a far less substantial outlay of public funds than many other departments. Upon becoming chief operating officer, Hernandez knew very little about public works and engineering; the county hospital; land use services; the county health department; behavioral health; the department of human services formerly known as social services or the welfare department; the building department; real estate services, not to mention the departments that function under the authority of county elected officials other than the board of supervisors.

Despite his lack of expertise in those areas, Hernandez had a

tendency toward micromanaging. This led to his efforts to dictate activity with regard to matters he does not fully understand, and which put those in positions of responsibility into a position of following through with action they knew to be ill-conceived. Those who had the temerity to point out that what he was advocating did not match up with standards, established methods of procedure or accepted best practices would earn Hernandez's immediate enmity. He abhorred independent thought. Those who attempted to reason with him were given short shrift. Women who exhibited signs of independent thinking, expertise and self-confidence were particularly likely to get on his wrong side. Hernandez staffed the office around him with physically attractive women who were adoring of him or could convincingly feign being so. No fewer than 16 women who made it to the higher echelon of the county's administration during Hernandez's reign as chief operating officer/chief executive officer were forced out by Hernandez or became so “fed up,” in the words of one former department head, with the culture he had created that they opted to leave. These included former Director of Public Health Trudy Raymundo, former Director of Information

Technology Jennifer Hilber, former Director of Risk Management Leanna Williams, former County Counsel Michelle Blakemore, former Principal Deputy County Counsel Penny Alexander-Kelly, former Acting Economic Development Director Soua Vang, former Deputy Director of Public Works Melissa Walker, former Director of Purchasing Laurie Rozco, former Director of Land Use Services Terri Rahhal, former Deputy Executive Officer Dena Fuentes, former Assistant Executive Officer Casonya Thomas, former Director of Behavioral Health Dr. Veronica Kelley, former Director of Children and Family Services Marlene Hagen, former Director of Agriculture, Weights and Measures Roberta Willhite, former Chief Learning Officer Dr. Trinkia Landry-Bourne and former Director of Child Support Services Marie Girulat.

Relatively early on in his tenure as chief executive officer, Hernandez began to manifest what at least some of the county's employees characterized as paranoia, or at least the occasional expression of the belief that some within the county's workforce were out to sabotage his administration, interrupt the function of the county while he was in charge or were out to supplant him as the CEO. De-

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Ontario Looking To Poach Rancho Cucamonga's Baseball Team

After months of clandestine preparation, City of Ontario officials this week publicly unveiled their brazen plan to poach the Quakes minor league baseball club from neighboring Rancho Cucamonga.

So confident are Ontario officials that they can outmaneuver their counterparts in Rancho Cucamonga, they committed Tuesday night to spend \$95 million to construct a baseball stadium in less than three years so the to-be-renamed Quakes will have a home field that will be ready for the opening of the 2026 California League season.

While Ontario officials stopped short of outright declaring that they have already sealed a deal with the Quakes and its president Brent Miles, there are multiple giveaways that the Quakes will not remain in Rancho Cucamonga beyond the 2025 season.

The Quakes, which started out in life as the Lodi Crushers in 1966 as a Chicago Cubs minor league affiliate, in 1969 changed to become an Oakland Athletic farm club. A year later, it re-affiliated with the San Diego Padres, changing the team name to the Padres. In 1972, it transformed into a farm club for the Baltimore Orioles, changing its name to the Orions in 1972, the Lions in 1973 and the Orioles in 1974. In 1976, the team affiliated with the Dodgers, changing its name to the Dodgers. The affiliation with the Dodgers ended in 1983, whereupon it formed an affiliation with the Chicago Cubs. The Cubs, however, ended its relationship with the team in 1984 and then-owner Michelle Sprague deactivated the team while she sought another major league affiliate. A group headed by former Dodger Ken McMullen revived the team, associating it with the Tronto Blue Jays and moving it to Ventura under the Gulls name in 1986. In 1987, majority owner Hank Stickney, backed

by a group of minority investors including Roy Englebrecht and actor Mark Harmon, moved the team to San Bernardino as the San Bernardino Spirit. In 1993, after the City of Rancho Cucamonga had constructed a baseball stadium subsequently dubbed the Epicenter, the team moved to Rancho Cucamonga as a San Diego Padres affiliate, becoming the Quakes. The team in 2001 changed its major league affiliate to the Angels and since 2011 has been a Dodgers farm club again. In 2013, LoanMart, an Encino-based lending company, entered into a ten-year sponsorship and naming rights deal with the franchise, renaming the ballpark LoanMart Field.

There are substantial issues with the now more than three decade-old Epicenter/LoanMart Field, which both the City of Rancho Cucamonga and the Quakes ownership are dealing with.

More than four years ago, major league executives did a survey of the stadium, reaching a conclusion that maintenance, upgrades, additions and modernizations, few of which are negotiable, will need to be made if the team is to remain in place as a major league affiliate. The price tag on those fixes runs, conservatively, to \$7 million. LoanMart, which engaged in the sponsorship of the stadium for promotional purposes and actually has no ownership of the facility, was not willing to share in those costs. For more than two-and-a-half years, negotiations between the city and the Quakes ownership – Brett Sports & Entertainment – as well as Quakes President of Baseball and Corporate Operations Brent Miles has been ongoing. The city wants the ballclub to anticipate much more heavily in completing the requisite improvements. The team is not prepared to make the sort of investment the city is asking for.

The Quakes' exclusive use lease at the stadium runs through the end of the 2025 California League baseball season.

To astute observers, the commitment by the City of Ontario to complete its stadium prior to the opening of the 2026 season is an indication that the city is intent on enlisting the Quakes to play there.

The memorandum of understanding between the City of Ontario and Rancho Baseball, LLC, a division of Washington-based Brett Sports & Entertainment, which owns the Rancho Cucamonga Quakes, strongly suggests that the Quakes are the contemplated occupants of the home dugout and clubhouse of the minor league baseball stadium the City of Ontario has committed to building.

Quakes, and it would not appear likely that the Quakes would operate another minor league team, although Brett Sports & Entertainment, Rancho Baseball, LLC's parent company, also operates the Spokane Indians, another minor league club.

The memorandum continues, "Subject to the team obtaining all necessary approvals of Major League Baseball Professional Development Leagues, LLC, and the stadium actually being completed by the required completion date, the team shall relocate the Professional Development Leagues club to the new stadium starting with the 2026 baseball season."

The 2026 season reference looms large, as, based on the now nearly three-year-long unresolved negotiations be-

stadium is not ready for occupancy by the team by the required completion date, the city acknowledges that the team will suffer losses and damages which may be impossible or impracticable to calculate," the memorandum states. "Should the city fail to achieve completion of the stadium by the required completion date, the city shall pay to the team, as liquidated damages and not as a penalty, the stipulated sum of \$20,000 per day starting with March 15, 2026. The city and the team agree that the liquidated damages amount is not a penalty and is a reasonable estimation of actual damages, as of the date of this agreement, based upon the inherent uncertainty and difficulty in calculating and quantifying damages caused by delays in achieving

hockey at the city's Toyota Arena. It is unlikely Ontario officials would be taking the risk they are if the team that will eventually play at the stadium the city is building were not a Dodger affiliate.

The council also committed to contracts with an architectural and engineering firm, Kansas City, Missouri-based Populous Inc, for the design of the stadium and supervision of its construction, as well as with Riverside-based Tilden-Coil Construction for the building of the project.

The stadium, to be located on the south side of East Riverside Drive, across from Whispering Lakes golf course, will be the centerpiece of what Ontario officials said would be a 196-acre, state-of-the-art regional sports complex that would include eight soccer fields, two football fields, four baseball and four softball fields, four tennis courts, indoor basketball courts, pickleball courts, a skate park, an aquatics center and restaurants. Dubbed the Ontario Regional Sports Complex, it will attract, city officials said, more than 1.2 million visitors per year spending in excess of \$60 million in that time frame, while creating more than 600 full-time jobs. The city said it anticipates realizing roughly \$1.5 million in tax revenues from the project.

In Rancho Cucamonga, officials there are flummoxed by the end run their counterparts in Ontario are running on them. With the departure of the Quakes in the 2025/2026 off-season, it is virtually unthinkable that another minor league team will locate into the Epicenter, given the trade area for minor league baseball – including the adjacent city – would already be filled by a Dodger affiliate. This will leave the city with an idle but still rather grand but no longer novel or state-of-the-art professional baseball venue.

-M.G.



The memorandum of understanding states, "The city agrees to fund and construct a state-of-the-art stadium within the to-be-developed sports complex located generally south of East Riverside Drive and between South Vineyard Avenue and South Archibald Avenue in Ontario, California, with an estimated stadium construction cost up to \$95 million with a completion date no later than March 1, 2026."

The memorandum avoids specificity in the statement, "This stadium will feature a minor league baseball team owned and operated by the team as the primary tenant." The team referenced, however, is the

between the Quakes and the City of Rancho Cucamonga, it appears the Quakes will be looking for a new playing venue following the 2025 season.

Another passage in the memorandum of understanding appears to indicate that the Quakes have no intention of returning to Rancho Cucamonga. Moreover, Ontario is signaling it is ready to bankroll the Quakes departure from Rancho Cucamonga by indemnifying the Quakes losses if for any reason Ontario fails to live up to its commitment to have its stadium ready for the Quakes by the time they will need it.

"In the event that the

final completion of the stadium. The liquidated damages amounts shall be the exclusive remedy for delay-related damages with respect to the delivery of the stadium, but are not intended to preclude the team from pursuing claims and causes of action for other damages to the team resulting from the failures or other defaults of the city under this agreement."

Ontario's willingness to put itself and its taxpayers in this jeopardy reflects the determination of the city council to move forward with the acquisition of a third Los Angeles-based pro sports team affiliated entity. Already, the Clippers and Kings affiliates play basketball and

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Hernandez's Emphasis As County CEO Was Less On Efficient Operations Of SBC's Governmental Structure Than In Ensuring That His Authority Was Firmly Established & Maintained *from page 4*

spite, or maybe because, of the way he had acted out of official channels when he was the chief operating officer under Gary McBride by bypassing McBride and meeting directly with members of the board of supervisors, Hernandez became concerned that those within the chain of command below him were communicating directly with board members or in some cases with each other in a way that might be an indication they were plotting against him.

Hernandez arranged, in conjunction with Williams and Human Resources director Diane Rundles to carry out a recruitment to staff the receptionist position on the fifth floor with an individual carefully selected to allow Hernandez to monitor who – including county employees and outsiders – was gaining access to the members of the board of supervisors. The application and selection process for the receptionist position was essentially rigged such that an applicant who under normal processes would not have been deemed qualified for the position survived beyond the preliminary rounds of the application stage and then was ultimately selected to fill the receptionist post. Upon

hiring, she was given instructions to monitor who came to the fifth floor and whom each person met with. The receptionist was also given responsibility for compiling the data on the county's ridesharing program, which likewise provided her with information about which county employees were carpooling to and from work with one another. That data was passed along to Hernandez. Similarly, Hernandez grew interested in being able to see information that could be gleaned from the key/access card system the county has incorporated for security purposes, which allows for a determination as to the location of county employees within the county's various facilities, or at least having an idea of which persons passed through which doorways at what time. Examination of that data can show if an employee was in or at least proximate to the office of another employee. Closer examination of that data can place employees together at certain facilities at the same time. Video surveillance of county facilities has been a reality for some time. More recently, the county, through its primary technology service provider, the innovation

and technology department, has installed 360 degree-capable cameras throughout the entire government center. That video footage captures the interactions, or close physical proximity, of county employees.

In addition, the innovation and technology department has immediate access to all emails and text messages originating or received by county employees on county-issued computers and devices. The protocol by which the information technology department is authorized or in fact is bound to release that data consists of the human resources department, headed by Rundles, signing off on such a release request.

Hernandez more than a year-and-a-half ago made a blanket order that he should be kept in the loop with regard to actions each department takes such that he was to be electronically carbon copied on emails department heads and mid-level staffers send out. His access to all county emails has given him the ability to check whether his order was obeyed, with one implication being that the failure to comply with his order constituted insubordination.

Insofar as terminations or forced departures of county employees were contexted on specific accusations/allegations of disloyalty or insubordination in which the adduced proof involved communica-

tions on county devices, it is known that Rundles routinely and repeatedly utilized the innovation and technology department's access to employee emails and phone/device communications to justify terminations or force resignations.

What has emerged is that the triumvirate of Hernandez, Williams and Rundles effectuated the removal of more than two dozen county employees since Hernandez's advent as CEO and that in virtually every case the rationale for termination or exit would not be likely to stand up to scrutiny.

A subset of those appears to consist of the firing or forced exit of employees whose transgression was making an issue of, remarking upon or merely noticing that Hernandez and Williams were an item. In at least a few cases, merely bringing the matter up was enough for Hernandez, Williams and Rundles

to decide that employee no longer fit within San Bernardino County's organizational structure. In a few other cases employees stated that the relationship involving the chief executive officer and the head of administration blurred the lines of authority in a way that was either inappropriate or represented a conflict that could have untoward repercussions. In certain such cases where no official complaint was lodged, those employees were ultimately separated from the county. A few made clear that they wanted to make an official record of their objection. This led to, the *Sentinel* is informed, to "one-on-one, closed door meetings" between those employees and Rundles. In those meetings, Rundles was told point blank that there were clear and apparent signs of what was taking place between Hernandez and Williams as well as impacts on the

way in which the county was being run.

"That's where Diane Rundles is complicit," one county employee said. "She short-circuited all of those complaints. When the employees continued to question why Leonard and Pam were allowed to carry on like that, she would say, 'Are you sure you want to do this? There will be no turning back. At the end of the day, you will be cutting ties with the county and lose any future chance at promotion.' The implication wasn't that making such a complaint might not go well; it was that it would not go well."

Rundles succeeded in having most of the potential complaints about Hernandez and Williams dropped altogether. In the two cases where complaints were logged, they were done "off the books." The conclusion, arrived at by Rundles herself was that the com-

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Desert Road Bridges In Need Of Repair

from page 4

for Rebuilding America grants. The federal government, however, allows up to half of the local match money for Infrastructure for Rebuilding America grants to be derived from other federal funds. The San Bernardino County Transportation Authority committed to allocating \$49,000,000 for use by the county as the local

match. Funding sources for the local match amount will be funded with Local Partnership Program, Surface Transportation Program and State Transportation Improvement Program funds administered by the San Bernardino County Transportation Authority.

The county at this point is merely competing for the grants.

Under the United States Department of Transportation Multi-

modal Project Discretionary Grant Program, the money can be used to replace bridges that are 20 feet or less in length. Bridges 20 feet or less in length are not eligible for the Federal Highway Bridge Program funding and the county must find other funding sources to reconstruct those bridges. The Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant Program has an August 21, 2023 application deadline.

-Mark Gutglueck

Initially Pleasing His Political Masters In His Roles As Chief County Operating Officer And Then Chief Executive Officer, Hernandez Began To Slip When His Emphasis On Loyalty Over Competence Translated Into Diminishing Productivity *from page 6*

plaints lacked substance and were “unsustained.” Both employees that lodged those complaints are no longer with the county.

Roughly a year into his time as CEO, Hernandez became concerned with what he considered to be less than flattering press and media accounts relating to the county. He sought to restrict county employees from making any statements to reporters or media representatives, directing that unofficial statements were prohibited and only his office or that of the county’s public information division could make official statements on behalf of the county. When leaks persisted, investigations to determine where they had originated from were undertaken, followed in some cases by terminations. The criteria used in justifying those firings was not a standard of demonstrable proof but articulatable grounds for suspicion.

There are consistent reports about how Hernandez, working in tandem with Williams and Rundles, went about forcing employees to take leave of the county.

In some cases, the *Sentinel* is informed, employees on their own made the decision to tender their resignations.

In other cases, they were confronted with the prospect of being terminated outright. At that point, the employee would be offered a separation agreement, including a severance package consisting of several months’ salary and short-term continuation of medical benefits. The employee was told that any hesitation in accepting and signing the separation agreement, which included the monetary payout, benefits extension and a nondisclosure agreement, would result in its permanent withdrawal and an immediate ter-

mination. Those so approached were given no warning and no chance to review the separation agreement language on their own or with an attorney, should they have chosen to have such a legal review. In many cases, the employees elected on the spot and under the circumstances to secure the separation agreement, and a nondisclosure agreement was executed, which essentially ended any prospect that the situation would get any public scrutiny.

Curt Hagman was elevated by his board colleagues to serve as chairman in January 2019 and was given a rare two-year extension in that assignment in January 2021. Thus, throughout what was nearly the first two-and-a-half years of Hernandez’s tenure as CEO, he served while the county was under the political dominance of Hagman, who had been instrumental in the move to ease McBride out as CEO and replace him with Hernandez. A great deal of Hernandez’s focus as CEO had been on calibrating county policy in a way that was particularly pleasing to Hagman.

Hernandez’s assumption of the county chief executive officer position came at roughly the six-month mark in the COVID pandemic. The practices and much of the function of the board officers changed with the advent of the COVID crisis. During the height of the panic over the virus and thereafter, governmental offices in San Bernardino County at the county and city levels grew disconnected from the region’s citizens, who were under lockdown/quarantining mandates and from a portion of the county’s and cities’ own workforces, portions of which were given license and permission to work remotely or from home. Fifth District Supervi-

sor Josie Gonzales, who represented the Fifth District until December 2020, and Supervisor Joe Baca, who was elected in 2020 and succeeded her, did spend time in the governmental center/county administration building in San Bernardino because the Fifth District encompasses San Bernardino.

Hagman was involved in COVID Outreach in the 4th District communities of Ontario, Chino, Montclair and Chino Hills.

Rowe was involved in outreach in her Third District communities, stretching from Grand Terrace through Loma Linda, Redlands, Highland, Yucaipa, Yucca Valley, Twentynine Palms, Barstow, Big Bear Lake and some smaller mountain and desert towns.

Then-Second District Supervisor Janice Rutherford was not present very much in San Bernardino during the last two years of her time in office from 2020 to 2022, spending most of her time in her Rancho Cucamonga office.

First District Supervisor Paul Cook was not present in San Bernardino on a continuous basis at that time either.

In San Bernardino, at the government center and the five-story county administrative building, Hernandez was in complete ascendancy, with no one on the board monitoring his day-to-day function and the only real interaction between the board and him taking place on meeting dates, and often not even then, as certain members would participate in the meetings remotely. No one was in place in San Bernardino to witness him in action, let alone keep him accountable. With a small cadre of employees, he had control over virtually every aspect of the county’s function. In conjunction with the county’s public information office, he created a narrative that lauded the county’s administrative suite, profiling him as the model executive.

Below the surface,

there were issues with regard to financial irregularities, misspending of grant funds intended for specified programs, audits that caught those anomalies but were ignored or disregarded, questionable expense expenditures and appointments to high-ranking positions, which the board took little or no stock of.

Since 2020, board members had not engaged in the questioning of expenses or qualifications of department heads or executive appointments, deferring in every case to what they considered Hernandez’s superior judgment and situational awareness.

Some staff questions surfaced, but those inquiries were either not acknowledged or they were ignored, with the concerns inherent in those questions falling on deaf ears. If staff persisted in that questioning, Hernandez, Williams and Rundles would swing into action and those responsible for the inquiries would soon find themselves presented with invitations to take their leave of the county.

Hernandez was sensitive to the consideration that in October 2021, Supervisor Dawn Rowe’s office had suffered a setback and never fully recovered when her chief of staff, Matt Knox, left his assignment guiding her politically and her office functionally to take on a job elsewhere in the county as the American Rescue Plan Act Program coordinator. As a consequence, Hernandez had devoted a portion of his time and the time of those within the chief executive’s office to assisting Rowe with issues relating to the Third District, which she represents. This allowed Hernandez to develop a close working relationship with Rowe.

In the summer/third quarter of 2022 it began to be apparent that county productivity and execution of projects were lagging or at a standstill. Unspoken about was the degree to which attrition in the ranks of the

county’s more experienced administrators and mid-level managers and their replacement by newcomers unequal to the task before them had led to the malaise. As time progressed, minor steps were taken to appease those at the supervisors’ local offices who were dealing with the brunt of the incoming complaints. Information with regard to those efforts was provided in most of those cases by Hernandez himself.

In December 2022, as the preparations were being made for the chairmanship change from Hagman to Rowe the following month, Hernandez’s attention shifted toward Rowe. Rowe’s reaction and her outward demeanor, in which she represented Hernandez as the key, indeed indispensable, personage in the county’s leadership team engendered in Hernandez a sense of security.

In February, then through into the following month and extending into April was an exposition of fiddling while Rome was burning.

On February 15, the National Weather Service gave an indication that a major weather front was going to converge on Southern California beginning as early as February 21.

Under the protocol specified in the county’s comprehensive emergency management program for weather related issues – the Flood Areas Safety Task Force Plan, known by its acronym FAST – upon learning that a major weather-related event is in the offing, the head of the county office of emergency services and the county chief executive officer, armed with information from the National Weather Service, is to convene a conference call with the sheriff, county fire chief, county public works director, Caltrans regional representative, California Office of Emergency Services representative, local CHP commander, relevant city managers and utility company representatives to size up the anticipated circum-

stance and begin formulating a planned action of response. Within 24 hours those entities are to reconvene to make a tentative outline of the response, according to the FAST plan, whereupon the county chief executive officer applies for authorization from the board of supervisors to begin acquiring equipment, supplies, manpower etc. to initiate the response. An emergency meeting of the board of supervisors is then supposed to be convened, probably within 24 hours, to give the county chief executive officer that spending authorization.

Despite those specified actions and the National Weather Service warning, neither Hernandez nor his appointee as the head of the San Bernardino County Office of Emergency Services, Deputy County Executive Officer Daniel Muñoz, instituted the conference call in a timely fashion, that is by February 16 or 17, as was indicated by the circumstance.

The mountain blizzard touched down February 22. The board of supervisors, which held a regularly scheduled meeting on February 28, did not conduct an emergency meeting relating to the blizzard until March 1. The media were not alerted to the emergency meeting pertaining to the blizzard that took place on March 1 at 2:45 p.m. until after 1:30 p.m. on March 1.

At that meeting, the board of supervisors confirmed Hernandez’s proclamation of a local emergency, expediting the provision of county resources, services and expenditures to render assistance as needed to relieve mountain residents impacted, including endeavoring to give the public and first responders access to necessary resources such as grocery stores, gas stations, utilities and public infrastructure. The board of supervisors proclaimed the conditions in the mountains, which it marked as having com-

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In Purging The County Of Staff Resistant To His Policies, Hernandez Was Aided By A Personnel Director He Advanced & Who Protected Both Him And His Mistress From Exposure *from front page*

rector of libraries with the City of Riverside, but returned to San Bernardino County in 2010, anticipating the retirement of San Bernardino County Librarian Ed Kieczkowski. In 2011, upon Kieczkowski's departure, Hernandez moved into the position of San Bernardino County librarian. In 2013, Hernandez took on a secondary assignment as the director of the San Bernardino County Museum. In 2015, then-San Bernardino County Chief Executive Officer Greg Devereaux promoted Hernandez to the position of county deputy executive officer overseeing the community services group. In 2017, he was made first the interim and a few months later the full-fledged county chief operating officer. Hernandez came into his own in the chief operating officer's post. That same year, Devereaux had been eased out of the county chief executive officer's position at the instigation of Supervisor Curt Hagan and was replaced by the county's chief financial officer, Gary McBride. McBride, a classic number cruncher much more at home with calculators, ledgers, vertical columns of numbers and spreadsheets than people, was affable and non-confrontational, accordingly reluctant to become forceful with the county's various department heads. McBride delegated much of his interaction with staff to Hernandez, in particular the most distasteful elements of the job, including meting out discipline and engaging in firings. Hernandez, who was a pastor of a house of worship headquartered in his Chino home, the Kingdom Life Church, had cultivated a public persona that was something a cross between a mild-mannered librarian and a genuinely Godly man. Nevertheless, Hernandez

proved more than willing to act as McBride's hatchet man, seeming to relish such assignments. By late 2017/early 2018, having heard accounts about what had befallen others, county employees collectively and individually came to dread the prospect of looking up to see Hernandez make his way unannounced into his or her office, at which point he would close the door behind him and then unceremoniously let the unfortunate employee know his or her services were no longer needed and that he or she was being separated from the county at once, oftentimes without the opportunity or privilege to clean out his or her desk. Hernandez came to be known, indeed feared, throughout the county's governmental structure as "the grim reaper."

Hernandez's decisiveness, can-do attitude and willingness to act was highly valued by the board of supervisors. A standing joke was that one day McBride would look up to see Hernandez, in the form of the grim reaper he was celebrated by county employees as being, darkening the entrance into the county chief executive officer's quarters, at which point McBride would learn that the board of supervisors had decided his time was past.

Indeed, that is precisely what occurred in September 2020. Window dressing was applied, as the county made use of the then-ongoing COVID pandemic to announce that McBride was being reassigned, without any decrease in his \$373,833.78 salary, \$95,934.21 in pay additions and perquisites along with his \$209,608.03 in benefits for a total annual compensation of \$679,376.02. The ever-agreeable McBride went along with the deal. Hernandez was promoted to take McBride's place,

officially as of early the following month. Just like that, the 42-year-old Hernandez stood at the pinnacle of San Bernardino County government.

Two of the initial executive decisions Hernandez made consisted of promoting Pam Williams and Luther Snoke to the upper tier of his administration. Williams, an administrative analyst and one of at least three female county employees with whom Hernandez was having sexual relations, was rewarded with the position of San Bernardino County chief of administration. Snoke, a deputy executive officer with the county, was moved into the chief operating officer position Hernandez had left to become CEO. Snoke was known for his competence and efficiency. Although not quite as ruthless as Hernandez, he embodied the same can-do attitude, determination and drive that had served Hernandez so well in his rise to the top.

Coming as it did in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, the commencing of the Hernandez administration was put to the test. Having established his reputation as a go-getter, Hernandez was determined to maintain his favorable rating with the board of supervisors by continuing to respond quickly to requests and to produce results. One prong in his approach had been accomplished with the elevation of Williams, whose loyalty he was confident he could absolutely rely upon. A second prong had been successfully embedded in the county structure with Snoke being put in place to clear a way through the county bureaucracy and control day-to-day operations within those areas of the county that fell outside the responsibility of the sheriff, district attorney, treasurer/tax collector/auditor-controller and the county assessor/recorder/county clerk – essentially those areas of the county for which the board of supervisors had authority. With Snoke handling operations,

Hernandez could relay to him terse instructions and know that what was being asked for, originating either with the members of the board of supervisors or Hernandez himself, would prove doable, even in the face of the pandemic and other challenges, and that it would be done efficiently and well, with as little bother as possible.

Hernandez's third prong, co-opting the director of the county's human resources division, led directly to his fourth prong, absolute control over all aspects of the county workforce. In May 2019, while McBride was yet chief executive officer, Diane Rundles, who had been the deputy human resources director in Riverside County previously, was brought in as San Bernardino County's interim human resources director at Hernandez's recommendation. In December 2019, again upon Hernandez's recommendation, Rundles was given full-fledged status as the county's human resources director. Even before he was elevated to CEO, Hernandez was networking with Rundles to refine the county's top administrative and executive staff to create a team that was amenable to how he wanted things run. In essence, that meant purging the county's top positions of those who did not in short order reveal themselves to be Hernandez loyalists. Multiple current and former county employees relate that Hernandez, in dealing with all of the county's workforce, meaning employees from minor rank right up to the level of assistant county executive officer, valued loyalty over competence. From his third year as county chief operating officer, at which point Hernandez was angling toward, and fully expectant of, becoming chief executive officer, he was installing individuals he knew or believed would be beholden to him for promotions into high-ranking and high-paying positions. In many of the cases,

those employees would have been unlikely to achieve those positions at all. In others, they made early advancement that otherwise might have taken them years to obtain. Rundles was in-



Diane Rundles

strumental in effectuating the terminations, or forcing the departures, of employees who were not favored by Hernandez to clear the way for the promotions or hirings of those he wanted in those key positions.

Moreover, Rundles sponged the bells of alarm that on occasion were sounded by employees who took note of the corners Hernandez was cutting, questionable actions he took or had others engage in and even those who objected to his appointment of Williams, whom they recognized to be his mistress, to the chief of administration position. With regard to those who evinced too much interest in Hernandez having it off with Williams, Rundles blocked any objections to that breach in professionalism by solemnly warning those who indicated they wanted to file complaints about the matter that they would risk losing their jobs if they did, and she channeled whatever complaints were made with regard to the issue into a confidential file and then failed to sustain the complaints and/or forced many of those who raised the issue out of the county's employ, maneuvering them into executing non-disclosure commitments as part of separation agreements they were required to sign in order to receive a severance package.

"There was Leonard's law," one county employee told the *Sentinel*, consisting of a set of rules about how employees were to comport

themselves. "Even the executive team feared Leonard's law. He controlled [the] human resources [department]. He controlled the outcomes of the human resources investigations. Anyone who challenged him was pushed out."

No fewer than two dozen high-ranking employees with the county were terminated or forced to resign during Hernandez's last year-and-a-half as county chief operating officer and the 33 months he was in the capacity of county CEO.

Hernandez, the one-time pastor of Kingdom Life Church, had a curious attitude with regard to not only how the women who worked for the county within the very top administrative and executive echelons all the way down to mid-level staffers were to comport themselves but how they dressed and the posture they maintained while sitting or standing on the job.

"He took possession and control over women," said one county employee. "That even applied to the ones he didn't have affairs with. He wanted the women who worked in administration and the executive suite, even the secretaries, to have a certain appearance. If you looked to be unwelcoming, you were gone, one way or the other. With each specific woman, with only rare exceptions, he had a type of ownership over her, even if he wasn't having sex with her. It was this narcissistic ownership. It came out in how you were expected to dress, how you sat, how you stood. He wanted this ideal of perfection maintained all the time. If it wasn't maintained during all working hours, while you were in the office or meetings and even if he wasn't there and heard about it, he viewed it as being unappreciative of the opportunity he provided and disrespectful of him. He always tried to stay calm and collected. In his seminars he told employees they should always remain *Continued on Page 19*

For Hernandez, 2023 Would Prove An *Anus Horribilis*, As The Excesses Of Previous Years Came Home To Roost, Scandal Followed Debacle, Capped By The Revelation Of His Affair With The Woman He Had Promoted To Be His Chief Of Administration *from page 7*

menced on February 22, 2023, constituted an emergency pursuant to Public Contract Code section 22050, requiring immediate action to prevent or mitigate the loss or impairment of life, and provide essential public services, which would not permit the delay resulting from a formal competitive solicitation of bids to procure construction services for projects necessary to prevent or address the effects of the storm. In accordance with that finding, the board approved a resolution authorizing the county purchasing agent, subject to Hernandez's approval, to issue purchase orders and/or contracts in a total amount not to exceed \$20 million for any emergency construction and modifications related to the effects of the storm.

Nevertheless, the previous day, on February 28, at the board's regularly scheduled meeting, approval was given for Supervisors Hagman and Rowe, along with Hernandez, Williams, County Economic Development Director Derek Armstrong and four others to travel to the greater Seoul area in South Korea and Tokyo, Japan between April 15, 2023 and April 22, 2023 to represent San Bernardino County for the purposes of a trade and investment mission, and continue to strengthen relationships established as a result of the previously signed and renewed Memorandum of Understanding with the Incheon Free Economic Zone Authority. Despite requests that the mission be postponed because of the uncertainty that the county faced over the ongoing storm, the board of supervisors consented to appropriating \$5,829 to provide for travel and lodging for each of the nine people scheduled to

make the trip, along with up to \$30,000 toward other costs of the trade mission.

The following day, in addition to conducting the specially-called meeting, Hernandez and Rowe utilized a sheriff's department helicopter to bypass the closed roads into the San Bernardino Mountains and survey the storm conditions.

The delay in holding the conference of responsible responding entities by at least ten days resulted in a lackluster response to the nearly three-week-long blizzard that did not end until March 10, leaving roads impassable for most of that time, resulting in food, fuel and medicine shortages and deaths, the number of which have yet to be quantified.

In April, officials with the Federal Emergency Management Agency came to San Bernardino County and went into the San Bernardino Mountains for an initial assessment of the disaster. Those federal officials returned to the county for discussions with top county officials during the week of April 15-22, but Rowe, the chairwoman of the board of supervisors and the representative of the Third District, which encompasses the mountain communities devastated by the blizzard, together with Supervisor Hagman, Hernandez and Williams, who as the county's chief of administration had direct authority over the San Bernardino County Office of Emergency Services, were out of the county, indeed, out of country, junketing in Japan and Korea.

After Hernandez dominated San Bernardino County as its top staff member for nearly three years, warding off any criticisms of his performance and prematurely ending the em-

ployment of any county workers who engaged in those criticisms, it is not entirely clear why he is now in the delicate position in which he finds himself, in danger of coming in for the same fate as the dozens of county employees he cashiered.

Hernandez went on vacation in July and handed the county's scepter to County Chief Operating Officer Luther Snoke upon doing so. He was due to return from that vacation the workweek of August 6-10. It was while he was yet on vacation that a coup d'etat materialized. The board of supervisors was scheduled to carry out a closed-session evaluation of his performance at the August 7 board meeting. While the agenda for the meeting showed Hernandez to yet be in the capacity of county chief executive officer when the meeting commenced, Snoke was present in the board chamber in the capacity of acting chief executive officer. The board adjourned into its closed session. Upon returning, County Counsel Tom Bunton announced that the board had taken no reportable action. Unannounced was that the board had simply extended Hernandez's vacation leave. By not placing Hernandez on administrative leave, the board avoided the necessity of making a report of that action, such that it did not bring any negative attention or backlash to Hernandez or itself as a direct termination, suspension or placing him on administrative leave would have. That appears to have been an element of the planned coup, which reportedly included as participants a cross section of the county's mid-level administrators/managers, Snoke, Supervisor Hagman and supervisors Joe Baca Jr., Jesse Armendarez and Paul Cook. Pointedly, Supervisor/Chairwoman Rowe was not an active participant in the coup.

Some mystery surrounds the role of Williams in the recent de-

velopments and whether she willingly took a key role in Hernandez's ongoing undoing or was forced into it by events and developments beyond her control.

What is known is that on August 1, in San Bernardino, things began to fall apart for Hernandez, who was still on vacation and physically removed from the county seat. Word was getting out that numerous county employees were speaking openly about inappropriate action on Hernandez's part and that the top echelon of the county – meaning the executive suite to include Hernandez, Williams, Rundles and others – could not be relied upon to deal with the issues involved straightforwardly or in a way that would allow them to be resolved. There was a lack of confidence in the human resources department in general and Rundles in particular, it was stated repeatedly. Current and past employees did not trust the department and felt that Rundles lacked both integrity and credibility. Demands were heard that an independent agency would be needed to examine the allegations that were being made.

The next day, August 2, Pam Williams went out on leave. It was reported that in doing so she had requested whistleblower protection. Accompanying that report was that Williams had acknowledged having had a full-blown affair with Hernandez, with sexual overtones. In addition, she confided to a handful of other county employees that was case.

The implication was clear: Williams had turned on Hernandez. Why she had done so was not then and is not yet clear. Perhaps there had been a sundering in their relationship that had organically evolved. Perhaps the exposure of their relationship, which so many had known about for so long but had been intimidated into remaining silent about, made further efforts to keep it under wraps futile. Perhaps assuming

the guise of one of Hernandez's victims rather than maintaining the role of a co-perpetrator in his depredations represented a sounder strategy in terms of her effort to remain employed with the county. Not in dispute is that she was and is seeking protection from her former lover. On the same day, county officials contacted Hernandez to inform him that Williams had come forward with a report that they had, while he was CEO and she was the head of administration, engaged in intimate relations.

County officials took seriously the allegations that the human resources department and Rundles could not be relied upon to hash out a resolution of the matter. Arrangements were made to call employees who were recognized as potentially having information relevant to the circumstance into interviews, not with human resources personnel but those with the office of county counsel.

When the questioning began, employees were circumspect, conscious of what had happened in the past to employees who spoke too freely to Rundles and other human resources employees about Hernandez's misdeeds. Employees were given assurances that they could be forthcoming without fear of reprisal. Many remained guarded about what they said out of concern that if what they said could not be verified, they might be deemed to be trafficking in misinformation. Gradually, over a period of several days and over two dozen interviewed employees, multiple examples of inappropriate conduct on the part of the county's highest-ranking officials, together with details and specifics, have been uncovered. The tactics used by Hernandez and Rundles in ensuring the silence of not just a few but multiple employees have come to light. More than one employee has described Rundles' efforts to cover for Hernandez. Clearly discernible in the mosaic

being constructed by the county's employees is Rundles' confidence that she would be rewarded for her loyalty to Hernandez and bending the rules, together with her ability to avoid the questions that would come from others or the unions representing some of the county's employees who had gotten on Hernandez's wrong side. It appears that Rundles believed she was safe and above being held answerable for anything human resources did as long as she had Hernandez's support.

Every day, the *Sentinel* is told, new information is coming to light and rumors are being investigated and, in some instances, confirmed.

Some of the information is highly problematic, the *Sentinel* was told.

"A number of high-ranking administrative personnel have put the county on notice with the information they have provided," one county employee said.

As reports of what county counsel is discovering are making their way to the board of supervisors, they are seeing just how damning the evidence against not only Hernandez is, but other county higher-ups, ones who acquiesced in what he was doing and stood idly by while those who tried to do something about it lost their jobs or had their careers ruined.

"Administrative staff knew what was going on, but they didn't say anything," the *Sentinel* was told. "When questions were raised about what was happening between the two of them [Hernandez and Williams] and some people said they believed what was happening was, and should be seen as, inappropriate and unprofessional, their relationship was redefined and deemed as normal and acceptable. People knew there were one-on-one meetings between them and private interactions after meetings in his and her offices, off-calendar meetings, very clear and apparent signs of what

Continued on Page 16

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San Bernardino County Sentinel

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Under Hernandez, Two Dozen Or More Department Heads & Adminstrators Were Sacked Or Forced Out To Accommodate An Equal Number Of His Acolytes Whose Value To The County Is Now Under Question *from page 9*

was taking place.”

The office of county counsel is engaged in due diligence in asking questions, but the lawyers and the supervisors they are reporting to are hoping that nothing more will be uncovered.

But like a fatal train wreck, it is almost impossible to look away, despite what might be seen next.

“There is something new every day,” a county employee said. “If it isn’t investigated, the county courts more liability. The lawyers are terrified of what they will find. They don’t want to find out more. They want it to come to an end, so the county can go on to the next chapter.”

According to that employee, “With what county counsel has heard already, Leonard’s return is unlikely. He was involved in an affair with his own chief administrator. He was misusing, abusing the authority of his office. Human resources reports to Leonard. He compromised employee protection and employment laws. As CEO he oversaw that department and he used and continued to use the director as a strongwoman to enforce his policy, to strengthen his empire, his hold on the county. Diane [Rundles], who is the part of the county the employees were supposed to be able to turn to to make sure they weren’t being abused was in the pocket of the guy doing the abusing. That is why county counsel is conducting these interviews, because the county is in this position with a completely compromised HR director. You have numerous past human resources complaints that were not formally documented to ensure there was no paper trail when employees left or were retired or were pushed out. That’s why they are hoping these horror sto-

ries will stop.”

Confounding county counsel is Williams, around whose ill-advised entanglement with Hernandez much of the distress experienced by county employees revolves, who is now claiming victimhood at the hands of Hernandez despite the degree to which she, at the taxpayers’ expense, profited by her relationship with him.

Several of the county’s highest-ranking administrators who were promoted over the last two-and-a-half years by Hernandez now find themselves in a serious degree of discomfort. “You have assistant chief executive officers and deputy executive officers and department heads creating their own narrative,” a county employee said. “They are saying they didn’t want to do what they were doing or be accomplices to his management ethic. Their story is they are victims themselves, even if they were pushing his agenda.”

Two deputy chief executive officers in particular – Mike Jimenez and Trevor Leja – are worried about what will be revealed with regard to their knowledge about certain actions Hernandez was involved in.

Unknown is what ammunition Hernandez has in reserve to yet stand the board of supervisors off. He has already demonstrated himself as a skilled political infighter. Since the time he was chief operating officer there have been indications that he has been “making book” on the members of the board of supervisors. In both the chief operating officer and chief executive officer positions he has occupied a vantage from which to observe corners being cut, the way decisions are arrived at, what arrangements have been made and what political

horsetrading has taken place in backrooms or during closed sessions. As county chief executive officer, he had access to every email sent by or to the supervisors on their county email accounts as well as the text messages on their county-issued cell phones. Hernandez may prove himself to be more than capable of exposing, or threatening to expose, any number of things the supervisors did they might rather the voters didn’t know about unless all of this about his relationship with Williams and the other insalubrious and distasteful things he involved himself in can be set aside so that he can get back to managing the county.

One county employee told the *Sentinel*, “Leonard Hernandez’s real legacy of damage is the loss of talent the county suffered while he has been

here. There has been a massive exodus of people we will not get back. Greg Devereaux took us to a new level, and this has taken us down three or four pegs. This thing with his girlfriend just makes the county look trashy. This county unfortunately has a reputation of being corrupt and dysfunctional and this has taken us right back to that. He surrounded himself with yes people

and had a real nasty way of dealing with employees who had any kind of independence. He just needs to be gone. There is this suggestion that they haven’t pulled the trigger on him because he is able to blackmail the board of supervisors. That just perpetuates and reinforces what people have been saying about this county for years, that something really wrong is going

on here. The taxpayers and voters deserve better. The board of supervisors has to just get rid of this dirtbag no matter what he says or threatens to reveal. They need to show real leadership and look past their own petty and selfish political careers and fire him.”

Williams is scheduled to return from leave on August 17.

Hernandez’s leave runs through August 29.

Board Of Supervisor Sought To Conveniently Overlook The Pay Reduction Provisions Of Measure K *from page 2*

trict Supervisor Robert Lovingood, Second District Supervisor Janice Rutherford, Third District Supervisor Dawn Rowe, Fourth District

Supervisor Curt Hagman and Fifth District Supervisor Josie Gonzales. Lovingood had originally been elected to the board in 2012 and was, at that point, most recently reelected in 2016. He had chosen to not seek reelection in 2020. Rutherford was originally elected in 2010 and had been reelected in 2014 and 2018. She was thus, un-

der the rules then in effect, due to be termed out in 2022. Rowe had been appointed to the board in 2018 and in March 2020 had run, successfully, for election to continue representing the Third District, in the March 2020 Primary Election. Hagman had first been elected to the board in

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In 2008, Ontario Begon To Pilfer Money From Its Water Fund To Augment Its General Fund *from page 2*

rate that matches what is available from California’s Local Agency Investment Fund, a collective overseen by the California State Treasurer’s Office which makes low-interest loans among local governmental agencies. By borrowing from itself at a bargain basement interest rate when it has a need for money, a local agency such as a city can spare itself substantial expense on financing costs, most notably interest rates. In making such loans, strict accounting procedures are supposed to be applied and ironclad agreements in place as to the terms and length of the borrowing, as well as the use to which the money that is loaned is to be put.

Thus, surplus money sitting in a city’s enterprise account, such as its water division funds kept for water division operations or water system expansion or maintenance, can be temporarily transferred

to another city fund in time of need, pursuant to agreements being put in place ensuring the money is eventually to be paid back with interest. Challenges against a city doing so have been turned back by the California Supreme Court.

In the fall of 2007, there was a severe downturn in the American, California and local economy, precipitating what was eventually dubbed “the great recession,” economic doldrums which persisted for some six years.

To tide the City of Ontario over, a strategy applied by then-City Manager Greg Devereaux was borrowing from municipal utility funds and/or enterprise funds, specifically the city’s water utility fund, to shore up the city’s general fund. This was intended and initially planned as a temporary solution to a cash flow problem considered to be fleeting, one that was to last only a short time, essentially just as long as the recession continued. Upon the onset of an economic recovery, the borrowing would end and as the economy normalized, the money that had been taken out of the water department’s ac-

count would be repaid, or so was the stated intention.

In early 2010, San Bernardino County lured Devereaux away from Ontario to install him as the county chief executive officer, and the Ontario City Council elevated the city’s fire chief, Christopher Hughes, to the city manager’s position. Hughes, while well-versed in running the fire department, had no real experience in managing a municipality, and the task of overseeing a city as large, complex and variegated as Ontario was a challenge on multiple fronts, not the least of which was maintaining its financial integrity. Initially, the idea had been to keep Hughes in place as city manager just long enough for the city to seek out a municipal managerial professional more accustomed to the intricacies of keeping all of the moving parts of a city in harmonious motion. That effort was sidetracked, and Hughes remained as city manager more than three-and-a-half years. Since he inherited a budget that was dependent upon the augmentations from the city’s water fund, Hughes maintained

similar arrangements in the 2010-11, 2011-12, 2012-13 and 2013-14 budgets prepared under his watch. So, too, when then-Assistant City Manager Al Boling transitioned into being Ontario’s city manager in October 2013, the city had grown accustomed to using water fund money as part of City Hall’s operating budget. Boling continued pulling out at or around \$10 million per year from the water department to finance basic city operations. Boling lasted four years as city manager, and in November 2017, he was replaced by Ochoa.

Under Ochoa, in fiscal 2018-19, 2019-20 and 2020-21, the transfers of money – at an average clip of nearly \$10 million per year – from the water fund to the city’s general fund continued. That “borrowing,” as it were, was no longer justifiable. The 2007 economic downturn had proven abnormally persistent, lasting until 2013 as measured by some indicators. By 2014, the financial stagnation had ended, and in the public sector, among county and municipal governments as well as virtually all government-

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It Appears The \$168,437,597 And Growing That The City Of Ontario Owes Its Water Account Will Never Be Refunded *from page 16*

tal agencies, the healthy revenue levels of 2006 had been restored and in virtually all cases surpassed. Not only had the time to discontinue the transfers out of the water fund come about some four years before Ochoa arrived, but it was high time, as had been intended by Devereaux and the municipal management team that surrounded him in 2008, that the flow of money be reversed such that the city's general fund began to reimburse the city's water utility all of the money that had been taken from it over the course of the previous six years, along with the modest 2.75 percent annual interest that was the Local Agency Investment Fund's standard cost of money when capital was being transferred from fund to fund.

Nevertheless, for three years, Ochoa did not have the gumption to confront his political masters on the city council and strongly suggest that the city end the practice of looting its water department of money that by the rule of law and code of common decency should have been used all along to maintain the infrastructure required to deliver water to the city's residents and businesses.

In 2021, Ochoa at last plucked up the courage to take action to assuage his conscience and overcome his increasing concern that delapidating pipelines, cisterns and contaminated wells would converge on the city along with state and federal environmental and financial regulators.

Matter-of-factly, Ochoa let the mayor and city council know that the city could not go on mispending the city's water division money. He told them that sooner or later, and quite possibly sooner, someone

with authority and maybe even someone with the power of prosecution was going to take note of what was going on. With Ochoa informing the council more than asking their permission to do so, and by action rather than through dialogue, with the 2021-22 budget, the diversion of water funds under Ochoa's watch and at his direction came to an end, 13 years after it had begun.

What Ochoa did was a gutsy move, one he paid for.

As a city manager of a large Southern California city, under the standards of the day Ochoa should be able to count on being well-remunerated. Given his position at the epicenter of Ontario governance and politics – being, if not indispensable, to the city's operation then key to it, in a capacity of trust with regard to the confidences of ongoing and pending litigation, the performance of virtually every city employee up and down the municipal chain of command and his knowledge about the individual city council members' separate and intrigue-filled vulnerabilities – Ochoa seemingly had the ability, as the saying goes, to “write his own ticket.” But even as Ontario's budget hovered at around half of a billion dollars early in his tenure as city manager, reaching \$547 million through all of its municipal funds in 2020-21, jumping to near two-thirds of a billion dollars in the two years thereafter with \$650 million in 2021-22 and \$661,615,132 in 2022-23 and then nearly a billion dollars in 2023-24 at \$979 million, Ochoa's salary and compensation package remained static.

In 2018, Ochoa was provided with a base salary of \$320,229.00, add-ons and perquisites of \$31,633.00 and benefits of \$74,332.00 without the inclusion of the contribution toward his retirement fund, for a total annual compensation of \$426,194.00.

In 2019, Ochoa was provided with a base sal-

ary of \$331,706.32, add-ons and perquisites of \$33,932.04 and benefits of \$76,885.03 without the inclusion of the contribution toward his retirement fund, for a total annual compensation of \$476,437.68.

In 2020, Ochoa was provided with a base salary of \$337,038.08, add-ons and perquisites of \$44,295.28 and benefits of \$122,495.01 including a contribution toward his retirement fund, for a total annual compensation of \$503,828.37.

In 2021, Ochoa was provided with a base salary of \$338,566.16, add-ons and perquisites of \$43,229.09 and benefits of 106,996.55 including a contribution toward his retirement fund, for a total annual compensation of \$488,791.80.

In 2022, Ochoa was provided with a base salary of \$339,778.89, add-ons and perquisites of \$50,114.57 and benefits of \$84,895.51 including a contribution toward his retirement fund, for a total annual compensation of \$474,789.27.

Despite scheduling numerous performance reviews for Ochoa going back to 2021, the city council never made a definitive finding or declaration of whether it considered Ochoa's performance exemplary, satisfactory or inadequate, and it provided him with no raise.

It has been suggested by city insiders that Ochoa's boldness in using his own authority in ending the diversions of money out of the water enterprise fund to the general fund had sent a wrong signal to the city council, which collectively considers itself to be Ochoa's boss and not the other way around. The council's authority, as far as city policy goes, is absolute. If Ochoa felt that looting the city's water fund was unjustifiable, he should have explained that in private to the city council, the council's advocates maintain. If the council was convinced by Ochoa's assertion that the diversions should stop, the council could give Ochoa such a di-

rective. Still, Ochoa's unilateral action to discontinue the subsidization of the general fund by the city's water utility was, insofar as the mayor and council were concerned, an overstepping of Ochoa's authority as city manager. With his willingness to challenge the mayor and city council on that score, what assurance did the mayor and council have that he would not make further showing of independence by alerting federal or state authorities about other city deviations from what are considered best practices or providing them copies of internal audits that would show the city in a bad light?

With the city's budget having nearly doubled from half of a billion dollars to a billion dollars in the span during which Ochoa acted to end the city's diversion of water operation money to the general fund, knowledgeable entities around City Hall came to believe the mayor and city council were considering cashiering the city manager in favor of someone else they would have greater confidence in to march to their beat.

In 2022, the City of Ontario, which already had the highest level of revenue among all cities and towns in San Bernardino County, placed on the November ballot Measure Q, calling for a one percent sales tax override within city limits. The measure, which the city's finance department estimated would generate an added \$96 million in sales tax yearly, passed by a margin of 15,972 or 53.24 percent in favor and 14,030 or 46.76 percent in opposition.

In July, the city council imposed on the city's residents and businesses a 6.67 percent water rate hike, which comes on top of a 3.6 percent water rate hike put in place in 2021 and a 5 percent water rate increase in 2022.

While Ochoa succeeded in discontinuing the diversion of water department money into the city's general fund some two years ago, he

has not made it through the next logical chapter, which is to make arrangements to have the general fund return the approximately \$127.6 million that was diverted out of the water fund during the 13-year span accompanied by the fair amount of interest – estimated at \$40,837,597 that should have accrued over those years. He has not pressed the council, as some thought he might, to have the city's general fund refund that \$168,437,597, consisting of principal and interest, to the water department.

Inconveniently for the mayor and city council, in the weeks running up to the council's vote on raising the water rates this year, the issue with regard to the diversion of money out of the water fund to shore up the general fund all those years was raised. It was improper of the city's elected officials and highest-ranking staff members to impose higher water rates on the city's residents. Given the money that had been looted from the water fund over a 13-year span, the water infrastructure additions, maintenance and improvements that had therefore not taken place and the city's failure to refund the water account from the general fund, it was improper to be calling upon the city's residents to pay more for water, residents animated about the issue protested. Moreover, they said, it was unconscionable for the city council to gouge the city's residents with regard to what they were paying for water in the aftermath of their generosity to the city in approving the sales-tax increasing Measure Q.

The attention thus generated gave Ochoa the perfect opportunity to press for the \$168,437,597 correction to the city's water fund. He did not, however. When he was publicly pressed about the diversions, he stated, “The City of Ontario certainly does not ‘loot’ enterprise funds. Any ‘borrowing’ of enterprise funds is for specific purposes, features specific terms that

are compliant both with State law and generally accepted accounting principles, and does not impact day-to-day utility operations.”

He justified the removal of money out of the water fund by asserting, “The city did not borrow funds from the utility for general fund operations. Interfund transfers – as applied in government accounting – are not ‘borrowings.’ Any interfund transfers, historically and in the present, were and are based on costs incurred by the city's general fund on behalf of the utility. As definitions of ‘cost’ have evolved over time as a result of expert review and case law, the city's cost allocation plans have become more detailed, precise and, generally, smaller than what they were a generation ago.”

Members of the council roundly interpreted Ochoa's loyal support of their city ruling approach – with regard to the sales tax, the multiple increases in water rates and his abandonment of the crusade to refund the water enterprise fund with the money diverted from it to the city's general fund – as an indication that he stands foursquare with them.

Feeling that a decent interim had passed by which they could now raise Ochoa's salary and benefits without being accused of having done so because he went along with them on the water rate increase, the council this week took up making an upward adjustment to Ochoa's compensation package.

At Tuesday's meeting, City Attorney Ruben Duran said, “The

city council instructed the mayor to negotiate with Mr. Ochoa on Mr. Ochoa's compensation in light of a unanimously positive performance evaluation, which the council will recall had been conducted over some time. The final conversation in that process was had this evening and based on that conversation the council and Mr. Ochoa have

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Supreme Court Allows Measure K To Stand *from page 16*

2014 and was reelected in 2018. Gonzales had been originally elected to the board in 2004 and was reelected in 2008, 2012 and 2016. Under the term limits then in effect, which had been instituted in 2006, she was due to be termed out of office in 2020. Paul Cook had successfully run in the March 2020 election to succeed Lovingood in the First District. Joe Baca Jr. had run to succeed Gonzales in 2020, ultimately emerging victorious in the November 2020 General Election.

Under one theory, Measure K was to go into effect immediately upon passage. That is, once the November 2020 election was certified in early December 2020, all of the supervisors – Rutherford, Rowe and Hagman, who were already in office, and Cook and Baca, who were sworn in in December 2020, would see their total annual compensation reduced to \$60,000. Under a competing theory, the salary/benefit reduction would not apply to any of them, since when Rutherford and Hagman filed to run for office in 2018 and when Cook, Rowe and Baca ran for office in 2020, they did so with the understanding that the position provided a salary of \$166,193.21 along with add-ons, perquisites and benefits of anywhere between \$76,748.06 and \$114,712.71, depending

on the number of their familial dependents covered under their benefit plans. Since they ran for office and were elected with the understanding that was due them while they were in the offices they were elected to, their salary and benefits had to remain at that level, according to that theory.

In 2022, Rutherford left office in accordance with the term limits that had been in place throughout her time in office which held her to three four-year terms, and Jesse Armendarez was elected in her place. Curt Hagman sought and achieved reelection that year, as well.

In 2006, the voters of the county were asked to consider Measure P, which was billed by its proponent, the Second District Supervisor Paul Biane, as a term limit proposal for county supervisors, one that would thereafter restrict the supervisors to three four-year terms in office. Measure P also had a provision to up the supervisors' individual annual salaries before perquisites, add-ons and benefits from \$99,000 to \$150,183. County voters passed Measure P by a margin of 182,892 votes or 56.49 percent in favor to 140,887 votes or 43.51 percent opposed. As soon as the election results were certified, Measure P's salary increase provision was put into effect for all supervisors, including those elected in 2004 and those reelected or elected in 2006, who saw their \$99,000 salaries

increased by \$51,183 to \$150,183 annually.

With the passage of Measure K in 2020, the Red Brennan Group sought to rely on the precedent that had been established with Measure P in 2006, such that Measure K went into immediate effect for all of the supervisors, including those elected or reelected in 2018 and those elected in 2020. A decision on that was put on hold when the county board of supervisors filed suit to prevent the implementation of Measure K. The board's fallback position, however, remained that since both of the board members reelected in 2018 – Rutherford and Hagman – and the three members elected in 2020 – Cook, Rowe and Baca – had run for office with the understanding and expectation that the position of supervisor paid at that point \$166,193.21 in salary along with add-ons, perquisites and benefits, even if Measure K was upheld, the reduction of Rutherford's and Hagman's salaries could not be put into effect until after the 2022 election and Cook's, Rowe's and Baca's salaries, add-ons, perquisites and benefits could not be reduced until 2024. Moreover, the supervisors maintained, if Measure K was upheld, it would have no effect on the supervisors' remuneration, since all five would be termed out in 2022 and 2024 altogether.

The passage of Measure D in 2022, which essentially reestablished the supervisors' individual annual pay levels at around a quarter of a million dollars, complicated the matter further.

With the passage of Measure D, the supervisors and their supporters averred, they were no longer and had never been subject to a salary, pay add-on, perquisites and benefits reduction, even if the courts had upheld Measure K, which they said was an entirely moot issue.

Not so, asserted the Red Brennan Group. Measure K was valid, the reform coalition argued,

at least from the time it passed in 2020 until it was superseded by Measure D. That being the case, the Red Brennan Group maintained, applying the logic that was applied in 2006 when Measure P was immediately deemed applicable, all five of the supervisors who served between December 2020 and December 2022 – Cook, Rutherford, Rowe, Hagman and Baca – were overcompensated each of those two years by approximately \$190,000, the difference between the \$60,000 each was allotted under Measure K and the rough average of \$250,000 they were actually paid. Each of those, at this time, should be required to refund to the county's taxpayers something on the order of \$380,000.

Exactly how this will shake out, remains to be seen.

County officials, including members of the board of supervisors and the office of county counsel, did not weigh in on the full import of the California Supreme Court's decision not to second guess the Fourth District Court of Appeal.

Tom Murphy, the spokesman for the Red Brennan Group, told the *Sentinel*, "We welcome this action by the California Supreme Court. By refusing to take up the board of supervisors' challenge to Measure K, the court let stand a decision by the 4th District Court of Appeal. That decision firmly supported Measure K and the right of voters to set term limits and compensation for elected officials in an effort to reform local government. San Bernardino County is in desperate need of thoroughgoing reform in every nook and cranny of government."

Murphy continued, "San Bernardino County voters should be asking a variety of questions: Why did the county supervisors sue over Measure K when more than two-thirds of their constituents approved the measure? Why did the San Bernardino County Superior Court rule in

favor of the political establishment against the vote of the people? Why, when the Court of Appeal ruled in favor of Measure K, did the county board of supervisors immediately propose to overturn Measure K by placing its own initiative, Measure D, on the 2022 ballot? Why did the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association label the Measure D campaign as corrupt and despicable?"

Murphy said, "In the summer of 2022, the Court of Appeal ruled against the supervisors on Measure K. Within four weeks, elected officials, backed by public unions, politicians and local developers such as Jeff Burum, approved the so-called Measure D Taxpayer Protection and Government Reform initiative. The initiative was fast-tracked on to the November 2022 ballot. The ruling cabal then

partnered to spend over \$1.2 million in support of Measure D. Regrettably, voters busy with making a living simply did not have the time to distinguish the lies woven into the political elite's Measure D. The truth is that Measure D reset the term-limit baseline for each of the sitting county supervisors. In other words, current supervisors can serve another three four-year terms. Supervisor Hagman has the potential to serve 20 years as a county supervisor if he continues to be reelected. Measure D overturned Measure K in its entirety and tied elected supervisors' compensation to that of a superior court judge – and included an automatic raise each time a supervisor is reelected. Measure D offered county residents tax protection which they largely already had via the California Constitution, and Measure D threatened voters with the rescission of what reform it could be said to provide should those voters ever deign to readdress the issue of supervisor compensation."

Murphy said, "For far too long the county ruling class has misused and abused both the le-

gal and political process to stymie real reform of county government."

The dwindling hope that county voters can hold local government accountable and ensure the county's politicians acquiesce to voter-approved reform, Murphy says, consists of "voters being willing to choose candidates who have no political experience during local elections." He said the county's ruling political class has bought the name recognition it has through applying the political donations provided to its members by special interests who are buying influence with the county's officeholders. Murphy's advice to the county's voters is to "Select the name you do not recognize. It can't make the San Bernardino County political environment worse than it already is."

-Mark Gutglueck

Miserable Conditions Have Persisted At The Hesperia Animal Shelter *from page 3*

regularly seen at the facility over the last three to four months. The *Sentinel* was told that Briget Nicole Bengoechea-Meaden, who was the city's animal services coordinator, was performing spays and neuterings on animals, despite not being trained or licensed to do so. Bengoechea-Meaden was also diagnosing animals and administering pharmaceuticals to them, according to individuals involved in the shelter's operations.

Within the last three weeks, it appears that Bengoechea-Meaden has been relieved of her position as the animal services coordinator.

There were conflicting opinions with regard to Bengoechea-Meaden's action and whether it was justifiable. Some said she clearly was overstepping both her authority and ability by what she had done. Others said she was well-intentioned but had been relegated to a

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After Years Of Administrative Momentum Running In His Favor, Hernandez This Summer Encountered A Sudden Manifestation Of Unanticipated Resistance He Could Not Overcome *from page 8*

calm and collected, but, hypocritically, when women behaved in a way he didn't approve of, his rage would shine through."

That need for controlling those around him or those he led had been presaged in his role as a pastor at Kingdom Life Church, the *Sentinel* was told.

"The church had existed all those years previously, but in early 2021 he just let Kingdom Life go," one employee told the *Sentinel*. "He had gotten to where he led over 20,000 employees with complete authority and autonomy, and you could see this mental shift in him where he just didn't have any passion for the church at that point. He had fulfilled his desire to lead. He did bring some people from his church into [the employment of] the county around that time."

Some 20 months or so into his time as chief executive officer, the purging of the county's experienced administrators and mid-level managers who did not evince complete loyalty to him in favor of promoting or hiring less competent deputy executives, department heads and assistant department heads who would unquestionably do his bidding began to have an operational impact on the county, with drop-offs in productivity, efficiency and progress toward stated goals. Hernandez and the county pushed on, but in 2023, three major faux-pas, indeed scandals, buffeted the county.

Between February 22 and March 10, the Blizzard of '23 touched down in the county's mountain districts, proving to be particularly devastating to the San Bernardino Mountain communities, leaving some 30,000 residents snowed in and stranded without fuel, food and

medicine for the better part of three weeks. An untold number of deaths resulted, the precise quantification of which has not been publicly released. Hernandez, despite having warning of the snowstorm from the National Weather Service as early as February 15, failed to initiate preparatory conferences with the sheriff, county fire chief, the Highway Patrol, Caltrans, the U.S. Forest Service, the county director of public works and other key departments until February 28. That temporizing resulted in delays in getting manpower, equipment and supplies in place that prevented to a considerable degree the mitigation of the disaster. Subsequently, when Federal Emergency Management Administration officials came to the county to do a post-disaster assessment and provide the county with the means to mitigate future severe weather events, Hernandez, along with Williams, whose line of authority includes the county's office of emergency services, was out of the county in Korea and Japan along with Chairwoman of the Board of Supervisors Dawn Rowe and Supervisor Curt Hagman, despite appeals that had been made for that out-of-the-country trip being delayed.

In April, after the county sheriff's department's computer and communications system was hijacked by Russian hackers, the county paid a \$1.1 million ransom to restore the system's functionality.

In May, the county was hit with class action lawsuit on behalf of 5,800 children and teenagers alleging that the San Bernardino County Department of Children and Family Services had neglected to monitor properly or sufficiently

a foster care system in which foster children were routinely abused and neglected. The suit followed by five months a San Bernardino County Grand Jury report that found the department of children and family services so dysfunctional it called for the department to be dissolved and replaced, as the number of substantiated child abuse incidents among San Bernardino County's foster children had risen over the last three years to unprecedented levels.

In July, when Hernandez went on vacation, willingly entrusting to Snoke his authority as CEO, a coup manifested which grew to involve a handful of deputy executive officers and a cross section of mid-level management, along with the signaled support of supervisors Curt Hagman, Jesse Armendarez, Paul Cook and Joe Baca Jr. Hernandez's future hung in the balance. Things tipped badly against him when Williams on August 2 came forward, acknowledged she and Hernandez had been involved in an extramarital affair and sought whistleblower protection. She went out on leave until August 17.

Rather than entrust the investigation of the matter to Rundles, who in addition to remaining as the director of human resources was elevated in February to the post of assistant county administrator by Hernandez, attorneys and investigators with the office of county counsel began interviewing employees believed to be knowledgeable about the circumstance pertaining to Hernandez, Williams, Rundles and their efforts to discourage disclosure of the affair or retaliate against county employees. In short order, information began tumbling out and the circle of those being interviewed widened. What was related as being "damning" information pertaining to Hernandez, Williams and Rundles was churned up in the investigation. Hernandez was sched-

uled to return from vacation August 7, but at its closed-door meeting at its August 8 meeting, the board of supervisors involuntarily extended Hernandez's vacation leave until August 29.

Amid substantial tension over what was to happen next, Supervisor Rowe on August 17 posted a communication to all county employees. It stated, "I'm reaching out to you this morning to inform you that Leonard Hernandez has resigned as the county's chief executive officer effective today. County Chief Operating Officer Luther Snoke has been doing a great job filling in for Leonard while Leonard has been on leave. Luther will continue to do so in close coordination with the board of supervisors while the board determines how to fill the CEO position. The board and I are committed to a seamless transition with no interruption in county services or impact on you."

Rowe wrote, "Leonard has asked us to share the following message:

"It has been an extreme privilege to serve as the chief executive officer of San Bernardino County. I am thankful

to the board of supervisors for their leadership and the hard-working men and women who do amazing work every day. Due to an urgent family health issue that requires my immediate and undivided attention, I have informed the board of my resignation. Under the strong leadership of the board of supervisors and the county's executive team, the county will continue doing great things for the residents of San Bernardino County."

The *Sentinel* made inquiries with the county regarding this development. One inquiry related to whether the county had negotiated with Hernandez a separation agreement, what severance, that is, monetary sum, was agreed to be conferred upon Hernandez and whether the separation agreement contained a nondisclosure cause.

The *Sentinel* asked if Hernandez's resignation as CEO now obviates the need to provide Williams with whistleblower protection.

The *Sentinel* inquired about the continuation of both Williams' and Rundles' status as employees.

The county did not respond to the *Sentinel's* inquiries.

According to county employees, Rundles, who has been cut off from any information obtained during county counsel's interviews with county employees, has remained isolated in her two offices, with only sporadic contact with others. She has been seen at the headquarters for human resources and at her county executive suite office. According to county employees within her orbit, she has sought to maintain an air of nonchalance and indifference but has loitered in water cooler conversations in what is an obvious effort to glean any tidbits of information that others might have about what has been unearthed in the office of county counsel's interviews with county employees.

The *Sentinel* over the past several weeks has sought to obtain statements from Hernandez, Williams and Rundles. None has responded to written questions sent to them by email or returned phone messages.



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Ontario City Manager & City Council Lay It On Thick In Praising One Another from page 17

agreed to the following adjustments to his compensation for the coming three years. This is adjustments to total compensation. The council would like to adjust Mr.



Paul Leon

Ochoa's compensation upwards, total comp, by 9.5 percent for the coming year, the first coming year of his contract term, by an additional 9.5 percent in the second coming year of his contract term and then for the third coming year of the contract term, 6.5 percent upwards adjustment in total compensation."

Duran said effective August 13, 2023, Ochoa's monthly base salary was set at \$31,062.55. Effective July 14, 2024, Ochoa's monthly salary will jump to, Duran indicated, \$31,722.49, although he later said that number was inoperative. Based upon the *Sentinel's* mathematics, that number should be \$34,013.49. Duran further stated that effective July 14, 2025, Ochoa's monthly salary will jump to \$34,084.80, although Duran subsequently indicated that number was not operative. The *Sentinel's* calculation was that in 2025, Ochoa's monthly salary will increase to \$36,224.36.

Based upon the *Sentinel's* running of the numbers, Ochoa's annual salary has now been boosted to \$372,750.60 and will reach \$408,161.88 in July 2024 and \$434,692.32 in July 2025.

Duran said that Ochoa's total compensation, involving salary, deferred compensation and fringe benefits, now stands at \$43,996.34

per month, will reach \$48,176.75 per month in July of next year and \$52,751.23 per month in July 2025.

Thus, Duran's current total annual compensation at present is \$527,956.08. As of July 2024, it will be \$578,121. In July 2025, his total annual compensation will eclipse \$600,000, that being \$633,014.76.

Mayor Paul Leon in his remarks inadvertently acknowledged that Duran's compensation increase had been withheld from him for an extended time.

"When we hired Scott, he came in at a lower salary than someone might expect for his position and it was somewhat because we just didn't know him, and you've got to get to know somebody," Leon said. "We had consistently been paying our city manager more than what he came in at. The belief was that as we started to find ourselves more confident in his abilities, we would compensate him accordingly. In the years that he has been here, as far as I am concerned, he has been doing a spectacular job. Not only in dealing with staff, all of the things that have happened since he's been our city manager, the growth of Ontario, including that we jumped from a half-billion-dollar to a billion-dollar budget this year. His job is growing significantly just this year and the projections of Ontario before he's gone [entails a] massive amount of work. I related this to him: There's a lot coming your way. Instead of saying, 'Yeah, I want more than you've offered,' he actually said, 'You've given me the help, the ability to hire more people,' to hire the staff that he wanted to be able to help him achieve the goals that we set before him and make them come true for us and the residents of the city. I wanted to make sure that he was the best compensated city manager in the region and in like cities. He rejected some of the things that I recommended because

he didn't want to show some kind of dominance over his staff. In offering staff compensation, they're stuck at a certain percentage, and he didn't want to go above that. I find that very commendable. He wanted to be fair and honest with his staff. As far as I'm concerned, if we have a state of the city and we present Ontario as being the premier city in this Inland Empire, then our staff needs to be taken care of and our city manager has to be the recognized premier city manager, and I believe he is."



Alan Wapner

He lauded Ochoa as a "visionary" and "a man who has connections who is bringing those connections to our city that probably would have not even known we were here."

Councilman Alan Wapner said, "The city council sets policy, sets a vision and it's up to the city manager working with staff to implement that. I don't think anyone could argue driving through Ontario the impact Mr. Ochoa has had in the short amount of time, six years. We've always had great city managers. This city

has always been well-governed. If you look at what I call the renaissance of what's going in Ontario right now, all the exciting projects that we've talked about for many, many years and you've seen them come to fruition especially here in the downtown area, the entertainment district around the arena, the development of the Ontario Ranch area, a lot of it is due to Mr. Ochoa and obviously his staff and the relationship he's had in bringing in new developers and investors in Ontario that have helped spur the development we have. I serve on a lot of regional boards, and I see what CEO, executive directors, general managers make, and I've always been a bit bewildered why Mr. Ochoa who has much greater responsibility, a much larger budget and many more employees seemed always be paid less, not that these other folks did



Debra Dorst-Porada

not deserve what they got. It isn't like we never offered more money to our city manager. He has always stood behind the feeling that 'I don't get anything until my staff gets it.' He has basically

refused to accept any further compensation. So, I'm happy you're taking something from us. And you made it very clear you're happy to be here. You're doing a great job, and I won't say money doesn't mean anything to you, but certainly money isn't the



Ruben Valencia

driving force behind you being here. We all recognize that, and we all appreciate it."

Councilwoman Debra Dorst-Porada said, "People forget we're a 50 square mile city, 185,000 people. This year we'll have almost a billion-dollar budget. Tonight, our city manager stands number seven in comparable salaries with cities around us. Rancho [Cucamonga's city manager] is making more money than him. [The city manager of] Santa Ana is making more money than him. He has done so much in the past six years. He definitely deserves this. He really believed in Measure Q, a lot more than a lot of people. So, it's because of him and his drive to make sure that Measure Q happened that we have now the extra money to do a lot of the things that

we're going to be trying to do."

Councilman Ruben Valencia told Ochoa, "You lead by example" and he complemented him for moving to the city when he became city manager. He said the city had to consider that it might lose Ochoa, given that there are six other cities paying their city manager more than Ontario is paying Ochoa.

Ochoa returned the compliments.

Noting that he had been a city manager since 2004, Ochoa said, "I can tell you what makes the difference — where the money always matters, sure, that helps in terms of lifestyle, what have you — but in this business of public service what makes the biggest difference is having community support and having meaningful work from policymakers that know what they want to achieve. I can tell you across three cities, particularly my last one, that having the five of you be able to give clear direction and then back it up with the courage of conviction to make decisions, without fear creative decisions, makes my job infinitely easier than it otherwise could be. Then, with an amazing staff and an amazing exec team, it really is the best of all worlds. I can't imagine doing anything else. I can't imagine doing it with[out] a council that I will tell you pound for pound is the best I ever had."

-Mark Gutglueck

Running A Humane Animal Shelter Continues To Elude Hesperia from page 18

situation in which her options in caring for animals and performing her assumed duties had been foreclosed to her. The *Sentinel* was unable to reach her to get her version of events.

According to one volunteer at the shelter, a goat that was hit by car and brought to the shelter needed to see a veterinarian to have a decent shot at survival. Instead,

it was put in a dog kennel where it languished and died.

A photo taken inside the facility showed a dog lying in its own feces.

The city put out a statement that the shelter is at near capacity and was accepting stray animals by appointment only it. Simultaneously, the shelter began turning away those seeking to look over the dogs available for adoption. Some Hesperia residents charged the city with deliberate obfuscation. They claimed the shelter is nowhere near capacity

and that a third to half of the cages are empty because animal control officers are not actively patrolling the city to pick up strays. In fact, some residents said, the division is not responding to citizen calls vectoring the animal control officers to where those stray animals have been spotted, and wild dogs continue to run free throughout the 73.1-square mile city.

Another photo circulating showed caged dogs in an area of the shelter which the individual displaying the photo said had no ven-

tilation and where the temperature reached 105 degrees Fahrenheit on a daily basis.

One shelter volunteer told the *Sentinel* of concern that a padlock on the entrance/exit to the section of the facility containing kennels left the dogs entirely vulnerable to perishing in a fire.

An unverified report is that the city has appropriated \$2.6 million per year for the shelter operations that city officials, because of conflicting prioritizations, are not spending.

-Mark Gutglueck