

Letter to the Editor

July 27, 2010

The Washington Post Company
Editorial Page Staff
1150 15th St. NW
Washington, DC 20071

Re: Montgomery County Compensatory Leave Benefit— The Straight Scoop

Dear Editor:

The Post's article, "Time May Heal Budget Wounds," appearing in the July 27, 2010 edition of the paper, was patently one-sided and, at least in one major respect, factually incorrect.

As to the error in reporting, it is true that the concession agreement reached between the County Executive and the Montgomery County Career Fire Fighters Association, IAFF Local 1664 provides most career fire fighters and paramedics with 48 hours of compensatory leave ("comp. leave"), available for use only under restricted (i.e., budget neutral) conditions. However, the Post article incorrectly reported that 48 hours of leave translates into six additional days of time off for the fire fighters and paramedics. In fact, most career fire fighters and paramedics in the County work 24-hour shifts (48 hours a week on average, 2,496 hours a year), so the 48 hours of comp. leave—if all hours are used—is the equivalent of only two workdays.

Also, for the minority of career fire fighters and paramedics who work less than 48 hours a week (i.e., either 42 or 40 hours a week), comp. leave is *prorated* according to the amount of the comp. leave that 24-hour shift workers receive. In other words, these employees will also get just two days of comp. leave under the agreement.

Another fact that was conspicuously absent from the Post article, and overlooked by the Office of Legislative Oversight's overly simplistic analysis, is the fact that the comp. leave will *not* result in *any* loss of productivity or service reductions in fire protection or other emergency services provided to County residents and property owners. The County fire department operates under strict staffing requirements throughout the County which restricts the number of career fire fighters and paramedics that can take time off on any given day. The comp. leave provided in the concession agreement cannot be used if it would adversely impact these staffing requirements. In other words, County fire stations will continue to be fully staffed 24 hours a day, each and every day of the year, irrespective of any comp. leave.

The Post article also gave little or no recognition to the fact that career fire fighters and paramedics will not have had a cost-of-living raise for two years now, *and* have given up compensation and benefit improvements totaling approximately \$20 million in fiscal years 2010 and 2011 that were previously negotiated in good faith. On top of this substantial savings to the County, career fire fighters and paramedics are now being furloughed, resulting in a *pay cut* of about 2% for most of them (and 3% for

some), and an *additional* \$1.7 million in savings to the County. It is clear that career fire fighters and paramedics have sacrificed their fair share and then some.

For several months now, the Post has published a series of misguided and factually unsupported editorials and articles critical of Montgomery County employees and their representatives. It is high time for the Post to end its fervent employee-bashing stance (stemming, perhaps, from negative labor relations it has experienced within its own organization?), and return to fair and accurate journalism.

Sincerely,

/s/

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