



February 22, 2017, Meeting Minutes
Radisson Gateway, 18118 International Blvd, Seattle

The meeting of the Washington Citizens' Commission on Salaries for Elected Officials was brought to order by Chair, Dorothy Gerard, at 6:02 p.m.

Commission Members Present:

Greg Dallaire
Michael Donabedian
Dorothy Gerard
Liz Heath
Steve Isaac
Wayne Jiang – Phoned in at 6:00 p.m.
Sarah Mahoskey
Raymond Miller
Patrick Pavey

Linda Peterson – Phoned in at 6:00pm
Don Robinson
LeAnna Chauvin – Phoned in at 6:00 pm
Steven Starkovich
Larry Turner
Dick Walter

Staff Present:

Teri Wright, Executive Director
Lindsay Matthews, Executive Assistant

Commissioner Members Excused:

Melissa O'Neill Albert
Karen White

Lindsay went over the meeting folder contents, including additions to the Commissioner's binders. Teri added some insight as to the additions to the binders and from where they came.

Teri confirmed again that no members of the public present, so the Commission moved into a work session.

Teri got a letter from Supreme Court Chief Justice Mary Fairhurst, and read it to the Commissioners.

Larry asked: Is the benchmark that was referenced in the letter one that was set by the judiciary or the Commission? Teri replied that it was set by the Commission as a result of a Willis Study.

Teri went over a few things with the Commissioners including travel reimbursements, cell phone noise in the meetings, and a budget update.

She met with the Governor's policy advisor and the Office of Financial Management (OFM) budget analyst. The Governor's policy advisor seemed appalled that the Commission's budget has been cut so low and that it has gone on for so long. Teri asked again that the Commissioners reach out to her to see if they can get a meeting with their Senator or Representatives.

Raymond mentioned that the Commission needs support from the House, Appropriations and Senate, Ways and Means. He also thinks the Commission did good getting 1/3 of what was requested in the budget.

Liz added she thinks the Commission needs to take the advice of the OFM advisor, \$20,000 is not enough because it doesn't give the Commission what it needs. She thinks Raymond is right that the Commission needs support from the Chairs of the committees, but she thinks that the Commission can do that with the relationships the Commissioners have with their Legislators.

Teri said she will be contacting the Commissioners to set up meetings if they are available.

Dorothy added the budget increase that the Commission got is mostly for central service costs.

The Commission talked about the letter going to all elected officials about the budget deficit.

Greg asked: If a legislator is looking at our request, will they know what "central service costs" mean? Should the Commission change the wording to say "mandated central service costs directed to" instead of just "central service costs"? Dorothy replied that all agency budgets have that increase to their budgets as well. It goes across the board, she suspects that the legislators will understand what the increase goes toward, but she still thinks it is good to add the wording to the letter that has been worked on.

Larry added that it is his understanding that the Commission has to allow public input and access, he feels like the Commission has aced out the East side of the State due to budget restraints. He asked if the Commission could send a few people to other areas to get public input, does the Commission have the money for that. Does the RCW support that? Teri replied the RCW says the Commission has to provide the meetings for public input at four meetings after the Commission sets the proposed salary schedule.

The Commissioners agree that holding meetings only in Sea-Tac and Olympia may limit some people from giving input. Greg added that this is the first time that the Commission has not gone around the state for meetings. The Commission tried to raise that point with the Attorney General, but haven't heard back yet.

Teri said that she has inquired about the formal opinion with the Attorney General and they do have a draft ready. The AG's office gave no indication as to when it would be ready.

Raymond added his suggestion to the letter, that the recipients be addressed separately, not lumped together. Teri clarified that each person would be getting the letter addressed to themselves only, the reason it is written on the draft is to show the Commissioners who the letter will be sent to, it will not look like that when it is sent out.

Teri then clarified that while she would love to send Commissioners to Eastern Washington and South West Washington, to gain public input, the Commission does not have the budget. So sending anyone would not fit into the budget this year.

Larry suggested to see what it would cost to send a small delegation over to get public input. Teri clarified that it would have to be at least nine people to be considered a meeting, whether that be over the phone or in person. Either way it is not in the budget at this point. Greg added we might be able to do that next salary setting session. Steven believed the intent is that each district participates.

Raymond asked: Would the Commission consider a letter to the editor talking about the condition of the Salaries Commission, and that is about to go out of business for lack of adequate funding? The citizens of Washington State have constitutionally mandated the Commission to regulate the salaries of the elected officials. Why is this happening? Do people know that it's happening?

Dick added that the Commission already did that. Dick as the Chair at the time, wrote the letter, and Teri tried to get people to notice. Raymond said that the Commission needs to keep sending out more letters. He suggested sending the letter via fax or email as well. Steven added that he thinks sending the letters to the editors with a spin, saying if the Commission goes under then the legislature would take over setting salaries again that might appeal more to people, to keep the legislators from setting their own salaries.

Larry asked: Is it possible to show what cuts would have to be made as a Commission? For example" If the Commission doesn't get this money it will have to cut blank. Or if you give the Commission this much it can do all that is mandated." That way they can decide.

Raymond added that when he was a legislative assistant they very rarely responded to out of district concerns and unless they got 5 or more calls they very rarely responded about an item, it wasn't worth the effort.

Greg mentioned that a lot of the smaller agencies are appointed by the Governor or someone and the Salary Commission is not appointed by anyone. The Commission is independent. He suggested the Commission add a bullet points to the letter. Steven added that maybe adding a bullet point about State records being vulnerable where they are kept currently.

Dick said that the last few sentences really say what is necessary, then they can ask for elaboration. The previous Lieutenant Governor was sympathetic and said he would help the Commission if he could.

Michael asked: Could Teri tell the Commissioners how the bullet points breakout into percentages? Does she happen to know that off the top of her head? Teri replied as far as budget money she doesn't know off the top of her head and would have to check in to it.

Don asked: Does Teri have numbers from travel costs in the past? Like the numbers for going over the mountains and such. Teri replied she does have those numbers.

Greg asked: Are the Commissioners on board with the letter? No one replied that they were not.

Dick believed that we still don't have anything in writing on how the Commission benchmarks or doesn't benchmarks. Benchmarks are only one thing the Commission looks at when determining salaries. But he thinks there is still a lot of confusion about benchmarks. The Commission is not moving toward a 100% parity of the Federal Bench.

Teri added that during the January meeting Melissa O'Neill Albert read the definition of benchmark and Teri wants to reiterate that is only one item that the Commission looks at. It is also important to read the Willis reports, Teri asked that if the Commissioners haven't read them to please do. That is where the benchmarks came from. Teri is willing to write a letter to the courts to let them know a benchmark is not a 100% goal and it is not the only item to be considered when setting salaries.

Dick made a suggestion that in the meeting minutes it shows the definition of bench mark and that the Commission is not working toward 100% parity with the Federal Bench. That the Commission looks at many things when deciding the salaries. Teri said the definition of benchmark is in the January meeting minutes.

Greg added that he heard on the news this week, apparently there was in one of the houses, a provision that substantially increased the SPI responsibilities. Teri will see if there is a bill about that.

Teri also mentioned that someone contacted her to ask if the Commission could look to setting the salaries at a different time of year. Her reply was that the RCW would have to be re-written, but that the Commission would be willing to look at it.

Sarah asked if the Commission had gotten any emails this year about the proposed salary that was released. Steven added it may be one of the effects of not having meetings out in the field, it may be stifling public input. Patrick added that he thinks that it didn't even take 24 hours after the proposed salary was released last session until the Commission received 40-50 emails and responses.

Meeting adjourned at 7:03p.m.



Dorothy Gerard, Chair

February 22, 2017

Date