

## Levy County employees' health insurance rate hikes leads to grievance filed by union

By Jeff M. Hardison © Aug. 10, 2017 at 12:27 a.m.

**BRONSON** – Sally Ann Collins, a staunch Levy County Republican, took time Tuesday morning to try to shine more light on the adopted changes for county workers' health insurance payments.

Some county workers are seeing a \$4,000 to \$5,000 reduced net annual income, despite "raises" to offset the hundreds of percentage points in increased costs to those employees for health insurance. The County Commission this year shifted a lot of the burden to employees -- even beyond the increase in rates by the insurance company.

The hardest hit appears to be employees who have family members on their insurance plans.

Collins said she missed that budget meeting when this insurance rate hike for employees was discussed and approved.

Some of the employees find this "totally intolerable," Collins said she believes after speaking with some county workers.

Another speaker on this issue Tuesday morning was Jeremiah Tattersall, who is with the North Central Florida Central Labor Council.

This council represents AFL-CIO- affiliated unions in the 12-County North Central Florida area, Tattersall said, including Levy, Gilchrist, Dixie, Alachua, Marion and Putnam counties.

While unions practice democratic ideals, Tattersall let the County Commission know there are many Republicans in the unions, including the union members in Levy County.

He said the decisions made by the County Commission in regard to raises and health insurance was imposed upon the workers rather than having reached this point after going through the negotiation process.

Even if all of the discussions and negotiations ended with the same result that has come to be by a 4-0 County Commission vote, at least the two parties – management and labor – would have gone through the democratic process to reach the conclusion, he said.

He urges the County Commission to go to the workers and speak with them about the insurance proposal, and to listen to their concerns. Tattersall spoke as if there could be some hope for this adopted plan to somehow be undone.

Chairman John Meeks said County Attorney Anne Brown advised the commissioners to not comment about the matter, because the commission is in negotiations with the unions.

Katy Yanok, president of IAFF Local 4069, said the union started negotiations with County Administrator's Office on June 12, with the first session for negotiating with the Public Safety Department director and the Human Resources director on July 21.

A grievance has been filed, Yanok said. Levy County Public Safety Director Mitch Harrell will be dealing with this relatively soon, she said, and then the matter may go to the county coordinator.

Linda Cooper said that it appears the county attorney failed to notice contract violations when the County Commission chose to arbitrarily revise the health insurance benefit requirements for county employees.

Cooper asked why the commissioners were not warned of the probability of this issue of contract violations by the county attorney.

"Now we have to pay for outside counsel," Cooper said. "Now we have to deal with grievances – unhappy employees."

# HardisonInk.com

---

Chairman Meeks said that until the County Commission sees the grievance, it cannot react. He added that every time there were contract negotiations with unions, Levy County has hired outside counsel.

Brown mentioned that outside legal counsel was used with Levy County's labor unions – rather than using the county attorney – even before she was appointed to the job of county attorney. Brown is not a labor law specialist, she said, and when she was hired this was made abundantly clear to the County Commission at that time by her.

Chairman Meeks said the County Commission has conducted its budgetary duties this year as it has every year, as he responded to Cooper's accusation that it looks as if the county had failed to use due care in regard to being fair with its employees in creating this year's budget, which begins Oct. 1.