

# Montgomery pay increases much higher than private sector

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Montgomery County Executive Ike Leggett . (Greg Whitesell/Examiner file)

Pay increases for most Montgomery County government employees outpaced the private sector's by 15.5 percent during the last four fiscal years, new data shows.

The 29.7 percent total increase was fueled by yearly cost-of-living increases as high as 4.5 percent and in-grade pay increases of 3.5 percent. The consumer price index rose 12 percent, while private sector pay increased by 14 percent during the period, according to county data compiled by the Office of Human Resources. The data applies to the more than 60 percent of employees who received in-grade pay increases.

Councilman Phil Andrews, who has been outspoken in his criticism of high pay increases in past labor union agreements, said the large difference between private and public pay increases reflects poorly on the county.

"It does stand out in a negative way," Andrews said.

Gino Renne, president of the Municipal and County Government Employees Organization union, said public and private salary information makes for an "apples and oranges" comparison. Renne said private workers are eligible for many salary boosts county employees aren't, such as profit sharing, stock options and year-end bonuses.

County Executive Ike Leggett's proposed budget for the next fiscal year includes freezing pay raises for all employees. The freeze would save about \$158 million; the county faces a budget gap of about \$1 billion.

The difference between county pay increases and private-sector raises is nearly twice as high as it was for a four-year period 10 years ago. In fiscal years 1999 to 2002, county pay increased 8.9 percent more than private pay. In fiscal years 2003 to 2006, the difference was 13 percent.

Andrews credits much of the increase to former County Executive Doug Duncan, who he said was "especially amenable to whatever was requested by county unions" in the run-up to his 2006 gubernatorial run.

Andrews said that after Duncan's run, union contracts that increased by 30 percent in three years became the norm. The firefighters union negotiated a contract with Leggett two years ago that included a 10.5 percent raise for most employees starting in July. That increase isn't included in Leggett's proposed budget.

Andrews said the big pay raises were unnecessary because the county already had good pay and excellent benefits and no shortage of willing would-be employees.

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