

Pay scale embroils officials in turmoil

County commissioners
at odds over staff wages

BY RICK NEALE
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VIERA — Brevard County Commissioner Trudie Infantini awarded her two administrative staffers 20 percent raises this month, records show — while nearly 2,000 county employees are entering their fourth straight year of salary freezes.

Last week, Commissioner Robin Fisher criticized Infantini for sending the wrong political message while Brevard leaders are considering tens of millions of dollars in budget cutbacks.

But Infantini's district office payroll remains the lowest of the five commissioners, records show. And she contends her staff was "significantly underpaid" to perform the same tasks as Fisher's staffers.

"The two employees do the work of his three employees," Infantini said Thursday.

Both commissioners have argued publicly about their respective office expenditures this summer.

Infantini — an outspoken fiscal conservative — has accused fellow commissioners and county managers of overspending and "scare tactics" during debate on Brevard's \$975 million operating budget.

Meanwhile, inside her Melbourne office, Infantini increased the annual salaries of her aides, Lori Helton and Linda Mannier, from \$41,000 to \$49,000, effective Aug. 7.



Infantini

Raises

Brevard County records show Commissioner Trudie Infantini awarded her two administrative staffers 20 percent raises this month. County employees are in the fourth year of a wage freeze.

Upon election in November 2008, Infantini hired Mannier at a starting rate of \$31,000. Infantini gave Mannier a \$10,000 raise three months later, records show, then added this month's \$8,000 boost.

"I need a 58 percent raise," Commissioner Robin Fisher quipped during a budget workshop last week.

Last month, County Manager Howard Tipton announced plans to lay off 118 more employees, eliminate 86 vacant job posts and impose 12 unpaid furlough days on workers, effective Oct. 1.

In an Aug. 10 comment on florida-today.com, Infantini criticized Fisher's
See PAY, 3A

Two commissioners bicker over staff pay

PAY, from 1A

\$309,281 office budget — the largest of the five commissioners. Infantini's is the lowest at \$257,391.

Upon election in November 2008, Fisher retained the longtime legislative aides of his predecessor, Truman Scarborough. Liz Lackovich, who was hired in June 1990, earns \$59,341; and Kathleen England, who was hired in January 1992, earns \$57,693. Neither has received a raise since Fisher took office.

"I want the public to understand that my staff is entitled to exactly what your staff is entitled to," Infantini told Fisher last week.

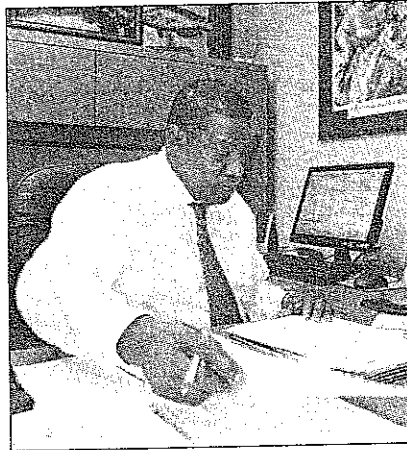
"(College) degree, education, experience, none of that matters?" Fisher asked.

"No. It doesn't," Infantini replied. "At some point in time, they have entirely the same skill set as your staff."

"And they have been underpaid for the last year and a half. But now, they are up to the exact same speed as all the other commissioners," she said.

Fisher contends that his district in North Brevard serves a larger unincorporated population and more miles of county roads, open ditches, swales and mowing area. Infantini says her office is just as busy as Fisher's.

During a contentious May meeting, Infantini proposed to decrease total commission-office funding by 12 percent (from \$1.45 million to \$1.28 million) and distribute \$255,430 to each district.



FLORIDA TODAY file photos

Commissioners disagree. Brevard County Commissioners Robin Fisher, left, and Trudie Infantini have differed over their staffers' salaries.

This move would leave her budget virtually unchanged — but reduce the other commissioners' budgets from \$19,834 to \$53,851.

Infantini's motion died for lack of a second.

Fisher — who also runs a State Farm insurance agency — responded by moving to decrease each commissioner's \$58,308 salary by 20 percent.

That motion also died on the floor.

Infantini unsuccessfully has lobbied commissioners to roll back the "Cody study," a 2006 pay plan that awarded raises based on comparative wages in surrounding counties and cities.

Fisher accused her of implementing

"the Infantini study instead of the Cody study." Infantini labeled Fisher's criticism "completely unfair" and threatened to dismiss herself from last week's meeting.

Bickering continued after Chairwoman Mary Bolin adjourned the meeting.

"If you attack me in the blogs, beware. Because I'm going to come back," Fisher said as Infantini was gathering up her papers.

"This time, I was well-prepared for you," Infantini responded before walking out of the room. ■

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Commission office staffers

District 1 (Robin Fisher)

Liz Lackovich, legislative aide	\$59,341
Kathleen England, administrative aide	\$57,693
Dorothy Reed, unclassified.....	\$41,040

District 2 (Chuck Nelson)

Liz Alward, special assistant	\$53,025
Melissa Renninger, administrative assistant.....	\$44,000
Elizabeth Burns, secretary.....	\$36,005

District 3 (Trudie Infantini)

Lori Helton, administrative assistant.....	\$49,000
Linda Mannier, administrative aide	\$49,000
Shad Wilson, engineer	\$12,480

District 4 (Mary Bolin)

David Dingley, special assistant	\$53,308
Janet Conrad, special assistant.....	\$49,000
Marcia Newell, executive assistant.....	\$43,000

District 5 (Andy Anderson)

David Isnardi, chief legislative aide.....	\$52,500
Dawn Johnson, administrative aide.....	\$34,850
Danielle Stern, constituent affairs specialist.....	\$26,130

— Brevard County Human Resources

How office budgets work

Every year, each commissioner is allocated general-fund money to operate a district office, including the hiring and salaries of aides, County Manager Howard Tipton said.

"It is up to their discretion as to how to spend it," Tipton said.

■ Current office budgets

District 1 (Robin Fisher)	\$309,281
District 2 (Chuck Nelson)	\$275,264
District 3 (Trudie Infantini)	\$257,391
District 4 (Mary Bolin)	\$288,902
District 5 (Andy Anderson)	\$283,517

■ Unincorporated population served

District 1 (Robin Fisher)	61,292
District 2 (Chuck Nelson)	56,370
District 3 (Trudie Infantini).....	24,543
District 4 (Mary Bolin)	59,145
District 5 (Andy Anderson)	16,200