

For third consecutive year, Commissioners return pay

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Since 2009, to help address tight budgets, the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners has encouraged all county employees to take special leave without pay, with a voluntary goal of 20 hours on average per year for each employee. In 2011, participating employees helped Hennepin save approximately \$1.9 million by using special leave without pay. In 2010, the amount approached \$2.5 million.

Because county elected officials cannot take special leave without pay, Commissioners approved measures through which the county's elected officials could also voluntarily return the equivalent of 20 hours. At the last board meeting, the board voted to accept the funds contributed in 2011. In earlier actions, the board froze their own pay at 2009 levels. Neither staff nor commissioners have received pay increases since 2008.

"We recognize the value of staff taking leave without pay," said Commissioner Mike Opat, Chair of the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners. "Because Minnesota statute prevents elected officials from reducing our salaries or taking unpaid leave, we arrived at this strategy – basically in the form of a gift to the county, which is permitted by statute – so that we could give back a portion of our salaries as well to address the deficit."

Statute authorizes the county to accept a gift by resolution if it is adopted by a two-thirds majority of the board. All six commissioners (the seventh seat is vacant) approved the measure.