

Swearingin hands out bonuses to Fresno Police Chief Dyer, top staffers

By John Ellis
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Fresno Mayor Ashley Swearingin has handed out more than \$200,000 in performance bonuses to key staff members the past few years, raising universal outrage among City Council members who say they were unaware of the cash payouts.

The bonuses – which started in the 2014 budget year and continued through the current year – came as the city emerged from dark budgetary times born during the Great Recession that featured the constant specter of bankruptcy. The current \$1.2 billion budget includes more money for some departments and boosting the balance by next June to more than \$16 million.

They also may violate city law. In 2010, the council approved the Transparency in City Government Act, which requires the city to post on its website information about city employee earnings and payments to consultants. But City Council members and union officials were apparently in the dark about the bonuses.

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Marina Magdaleno, business representative for International Union of Operating Engineers AFL-CIO/Stationary Engineers Local 39

The largest bonuses, totaling almost \$56,000, went to City Manager Bruce Rudd over two budget years, 2014 and 2015. Assistant City Manager Ramona Smith received \$30,000 – \$10,000 annually in 2014, 2015 and 2016. Police Chief Jerry Dyer received \$20,000 in 2015.

Others getting bonus money include city retirement system administrator Stanley L. McDivitt (more than \$26,000); Georgeanne White, Swearingin's chief of staff, and Kelli Furtado, the mayor's deputy chief of staff (\$20,000 each); and Economic Development Director Larry Westerlund, who got \$10,000.

Council members declined to comment, but confirmed that the matter will be discussed during a closed session Thursday afternoon.

Marina Magdaleno, business representative for International Union of Operating Engineers AFL-CIO/Stationary Engineers Local 39, said she was unaware of the bonuses, but expressed outrage when told about them.

"I'm really appalled because they nickel and dime us," she said. "It just really ticks me off."

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Fresno Mayor Ashley Swearingin

Magdaleno said Local 39 workers have not had a pay raise since 2011 and during the most recent contract negotiations they took a 4 percent pay cut by agreeing to pay the city's portion of the retirement contribution.

In a statement issued Thursday afternoon, Swearingin said:

"We are extremely fortunate and blessed to have people like Bruce Rudd and Jerry Dyer remain committed to serving

the people of Fresno. Both the City Manager and the Police Chief and a handful of other senior leaders in our city are dramatically underpaid for a city the size of Fresno. We have tried to make it up as best we can with annual bonuses, but even with the bonuses, these folks are still underpaid when comparing them to other cities our size in California. I'm just grateful they are willing to continue serving our community in their positions when they could easily retire or go work somewhere else and make significantly more money."

This story will be updated.

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