

4-12-17 County Judge's Article

TWO DECISIONS EXPLAINED

This week two decisions were made in the Commissioner's Court meeting that I feel need some further explanation.

First of all Sam Berry, Justice-of-the-Peace for Precinct 2 was appointed to act as temporary JP for Precinct 1 until further notice and will be compensated for the JP 1 duties at the rate of \$800 per pay period. This is as a result of the resignation of Rick Gommert.

The County Judge and Commissioner's Court have the authority to appoint temporary JPs from out of the precinct (including one of the existing JPs) as long as it's not a permanent replacement. We also felt this approach would be appropriate in this case since this position will be up for election this next year, and appointing a permanent replacement might give that person an unfair advantage in the upcoming election.

Some of you also suggested that we should consider eliminating one or two of the JP positions since we are having financial difficulties in the county. The answer to that is the state constitution has been amended so that counties our size are specifically required to have four JPs, so a reduction is not an option for us to consider. So our intention is that as soon as the voters determine who the next JP1 judge is going to be, we will appoint him or her to the position.

The other decision that was made was to change health care providers for our county employees' health insurance from the Scott and White Health Plan to the Texas Association of Counties Health and Employee Benefits Health Pool.

This decision was made in order to maintain essentially the same level of benefits to the county employees as is currently provided and to be able to do so within the budget that had been allocated for health care benefits for this year. Scott and White's proposal indicated an increase of over 19% to maintain the current level which we would not have been able to cover without a significant increase in deductibles and out-of-pocket maximums in the plan.

The Association of Counties Pool which is a non-profit coop of over 200 counties with some 54,000 county employee participants is able to offer an equivalent plan at a lower cost that we felt would be the best option for the county from this point forward. Over half the counties in Texas have banded together over the past few years to form this coop, and this year was an opportune time for Milam County to seriously consider joining the coalition considering the large cost increase we were facing at S&W. We certainly realize that there will be problems any time that there is a change of providers. We've been assured that all facilities and doctors that are currently in the S&W network are also in the TAC network plus employees will now have the option of choosing some others besides S&W. We feel this change is in the future best interest of Milam County employees.

