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10 county board members forego stipends in crunch

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Taxpayers will be saving nearly \$30,000 after 10 DuPage County Board members relinquished stipends they would have received for leading board committees.

Calling their actions the "right thing to do," board member Debra Olson of Wheaton said she and her colleagues have an obligation to do whatever they can to remedy the county's "financial train wreck." "Whether it is salaries, stipends or perks, true leadership means being the first, not the last, to take the impact," said Olson, who serves as chairwoman of the Strategic Planning Committee and vice-chairwoman of the Public Works Committee. "In my opinion, we can still do more."

The recent county budget cuts make it imperative for members to make cuts wherever they can, said board member Jeff Redick of Elmhurst, who serves as chairman of the Environmental Committee and vice-chairman of the Public Transit Committee.

Members need to share in the cuts being instituted in response to the county's economic challenges, he said.

"Given the financial crisis at the county and the financial future that's very uncertain, stepping up and showing that cuts are necessary has to start at home," Redick said.

And since leading committees are part and parcel of board members' positions, they shouldn't be considered special services, he said.

The 10 members who voluntarily gave back their stipends included representatives Mike Connelly of Lisle, chairman of the Economic Development Committee, and Jim Healy of Naperville, vice-chairman of the Transportation Committee. Other members include Paul Fichtner, Don Puchalski, Redick, Brien Sheahan, Grant Eckhoff, J.R. **McBride**, Olson and Jim Zay.

The \$28,000 board members are returning to the county would be doubled to \$56,000 if all members who fill the 28 chairman and vice-chairman positions gave back their stipends. Under current rules, chairman receive \$3,000 while vice-chairman receive \$1,000.

After the board voted last February to eliminate the stipends, the DuPage County State's Attorney ruled their decision was illegal since Illinois law prohibits board members from changing their compensation after being elected.

But Redick thinks there may be support in the future to legally change

the rule.

"It was something that passed before, so there would be the support to eliminate stipends," he said.

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