

State panel considers raises for lawmakers, others

ALBANY — A week after Election Day, a state commission on Tuesday began the process that could give pay raises to legislators and top officials in the Cuomo administration.

The state Commission on Legislative, Judicial & Executive Compensation, consisting of four Democrats, met for the first time Tuesday in Manhattan. They approved dates for two public hearings, on Nov. 28 in Albany and Nov. 30 in Manhattan. They must act by Dec. 10 under law if they are to enact the first pay raises for the positions since 1999.

Authorization for the commission was tucked into the voluminous state budget approved in April. The process allows the raises to be approved by the commission without a vote of the legislature or signature by Cuomo.

State senators and Assembly members make a base pay of \$79,500 for what under law is a part-time job. Legislators also get \$174 a day for lodging and meals while working in Albany or outside their district, in most cases. And most lawmakers receive stipends ranging from \$9,000 to \$41,000 a year for holding leadership posts.

The result is most legislators make over \$100,000 a year.

“You don’t want to deny someone a pay raise for 20 years, but what is the right number?” said Blair Horner of the New York Public Interest Research Group, a nonprofit watchdog group.

“It shouldn’t be a negotiated political deal,” said Horner. “It should be based on an independent criteria that’s publicly disclosed so the public can feel this was a reasonable process. It’s their money.”

“I’m generally in favor,” said Gerald Benjamin, a longtime observer of state government as a professor of political science at the State University of New York at New Paltz. “It’s been a long time, they’ve done well. The job is very demanding.”

Commission member H. Carl McCall cautioned that a pay raise isn’t “a done deal.”

New York lawmakers’ base pay is the third-highest in the nation, behind California’s \$107,241 with \$192 per diem; and Pennsylvania’s \$87,180 base pay with a \$183 per diem, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

As for top officials in the Cuomo administration who could get raises, the state commission noted that six commissioners make the national average of \$136,000. Three others make \$127,000.

The state's median household income was \$62,909 **in 2016**, according to the U.S. Census.

The compensation commission has scheduled public hearings for 11 a.m. on Nov. 28

in the center tower board room at the State University Plaza, 353 Broadway, Albany, and at noon on Nov. 30 in the global classroom in the SUNY Global Center, 116 E. 55th St., Manhattan.

The commission members are state Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli; McCall, who was appointed SUNY chairman by Cuomo; New York City Comptroller Scott Stringer; and former city Comptroller William Thompson.

If approved by the commission before Dec. 31, raises would take effect Jan. 1. Otherwise, raises couldn't be considered again until 2020, another legislative election year.

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