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## Shel: We'll raise our game – then our pay

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Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver is endorsing a pay hike for state lawmakers this year, but he conceded legislators must end their reputation for dysfunction in order to earn one.

Silver, touching on what many politicians see as a third rail of state politics — especially during tough economic times for constituents and the state's coffers — said it was unfair that lawmakers, along with statewide elected officials and top state commissioners, haven't had a salary increase since 1999.

"More and more members are full-time members of the Legislature, and it's significant that their salaries haven't kept pace with inflation for the last 13 years," Silver told The Post.

"People understand that before there can be a discussion of pay raises, there has to be a change in the performance level of the Legislature," the speaker continued.

Silver said that lawmakers would have to repeat last year's success of securing an on-time budget and also push through a "substantive agenda."

"That's the only thing that will convince the public at the appropriate time that a pay raise is deserved," Silver said.

Silver insisted that there had been no discussions among legislative leaders or Gov. Cuomo about pay hikes, but he wouldn't rule out talks later this year.

It's "possible that the governor would look favorably on a salary adjustment for members of the Legislature, along with state commissioners, if a good budget is passed on time and the legislators show the public that they're deserving of a raise," a source close to Cuomo said.

Senate Majority Leader Dean Skelos (R-Nassau), nervously eyeing the prospects for the GOP to retain its narrow, one-vote majority, refused to take a stand on a pay hike.

The Legislature, considered one of the most dysfunctional in the nation, worked successfully with Cuomo last year to adopt an on-time budget, a property-tax cap, ethics reform and legalization of same-sex marriages.

Lawmakers voted themselves a pay raise, effective Jan. 1, 1999, after the November 1998 election, fearing that if they had voted before the polling, many would have been defeated by angry voters.

Silver refused to speculate on when a pay-raise vote could take place this year after the November election, saying, "I'm not ruling anything in or out."

Some lawmakers say privately that they'd like to see a pay-raise commission appointed in the next few months to report back with a recommendation before the end of the year.

If lawmakers don't vote themselves a pay raise this year, they won't be eligible to receive one until 2015.

That's because lawmakers are barred from raising their own pay during their two-year terms of office.

The current Legislature goes out of existence Dec. 31, so a pay raise voted this year would become effective for lawmakers taking office Jan. 1.

Silver, Skelos and dozens of other lawmakers also earn undisclosed income from private law practices.

However, that will change next year, when a new ethics law requires the public disclosure of the approximate amounts of outside earnings.

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