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Lawyers Unhappy With “Modest” \$38K Raise For Judges

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OPINION

ALBANY—If you got a \$23,300 pay raise this year to be followed by another \$7,000 pay raise plus \$7,000 more by 2014 for an annual salary of \$174,000, wouldn't you be satisfied?

Not the lawyers and judges in New York State.

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As the nation's unemployment rate continues to remain high and retirees on Social Security haven't seen a cost of living adjustment in two years, the state's lawyers and judges are bemoaning a \$38,000 pay raise over three years.

Many people in New York State don't even make \$38,000 in three years.

New York State Bar Association President Vincent E. Doyle III has expressed concern that the Judicial Compensation Commission approved a relatively modest salary adjustment for New York's judges whose wages have been frozen since January 1999.

The commission voted to increase the annual salaries of state Supreme Court justices from \$136,700 to \$160,000 in 2012, \$167,000 in 2013 and \$174,000 in 2014.

“During the past 12 years, the cost-of-living increased by 40 percent, eroding judicial salaries. Yet the commission voted to adjust judicial salaries by only 17 percent in 2012,” said.

By 2014, the third year of the phase-in, judges salaries will have risen 27 percent over a 15-year period, far less than the projected inflation rate.

“A well-functioning Judiciary is critical to our system of government. It safeguards the rights of all New Yorkers while resolving both criminal and civil disputes in a fair and impartial manner,” Doyle said.

There's a whole lot of people in New York State that would wholeheartedly disagree with the

Doyle’s assessment of the state’s judiciary, one of the most under-regulated professions in the state.

Lawyers are upset that the system of lawyer welfare has finally taken a long coming, well deserved hit.

Judges are leaving the bench voluntarily in record numbers, according to a recent New York Times article, and that’s a good thing, weeding out individuals who seem to think they are entitled to a life-long tenure, regardless of their job performance.

In 1999, 48 of the state’s 1,300 judges resigned. In 2011, 110 quit the bench.

Doyle bemoans that judges have had to exist on an annual salary of \$136,700 and all the other judicial perks while thousands have been forced to make numerous and onerous sacrifices due to the state’s irresponsible management and fiscal problems.

The Judicial Compensation Commission was created by a measure signed into law by Governor David Paterson in 2010. The commission’s recommendations will take effect April 1, 2012 unless the Legislature affirmatively modifies or rejects them.

In a report issued in July 2011, the State Bar Association called for raising salaries of state Supreme Court justices from \$136,700 to \$192,000, to reflect the increase in the cost-of-living since 1999. 8-26-11

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