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Raise for Judges Is Shameful

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The New York State Judicial Compensation Commission, by a 4-3 vote, has decided that a fair salary for a Supreme Court justice, as of next year, is \$160,000. This is a terrible outcome for New York's judges and it will cut out what heart is left of this state's judiciary. It is a sorry end to a shameful episode that has seen judges' salaries frozen for 13 years.

The salary that the commission selected is an insult to every New York judge. It is a salary equal to that paid to first-year associates of major New York law firms—as of 2007. It is a salary less than what was paid two or more years ago to mid-level attorneys in New York City's government agencies. It is a salary that is over \$5,000 less than what was approved by the Legislature and the governor in a budget bill effective April 1, 2005. That money was never disbursed because of politics—what else?

For over 100 years, the salary of a New York judge has been deteriorating compared to the cost of living. Once the highest paid judges in the nation, New York's are now the lowest. Since the creation of the Republic, until 1974, New York's judges were paid more than a federal judge. Then politics took over the process and fairness for judges has died a slow death. We will never, ever catch up to the inflation rate. The commission selected a salary that will put New York judges at a COLA appropriate for 2004.

"Stiffed" is the only word that comes close to describing what has been done to this state's judges. If you don't agree, consider this. Say you haven't had a raise in 13 years and your boss comes to you and says now's the time. He gives you a raise, but it only lifts you to a 2004 salary level—a point your other 250,000 co-workers reached 10 years ago. 249,000 state workers got regular raises, every year, over the last 13 years. Those raises kept them up with the cost of living. 1,200 judges will get one raise, after a 13-year wait, and that raise will set them back over nine years.

I can hear Joseph Welch, the lawyer who challenged Senator Joseph McCarthy at the 1954 Army-McCarthy hearings, talking to this commission now as he did then to the Senate: "Sirs, have you no sense of decency, at long last, have you left no sense of decency." Shame on this commission.

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