



READERS' COMMENTS

Pay Frozen, More New York Judges Leave Bench [Back to Article](#)

By WILLIAM GLABERSON

The state's judges, who have not had a raise in 12 years, are resigning in relatively large numbers, not to retire but to return to practicing law.

Comments are no longer being accepted.

214 Readers' Comments

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76. HIGHLIGHT (What's this?)

AM  
Switzerland  
July 5th, 2011  
10:20 am

The negative, carping tone of the comments above is disturbing. Perhaps I am missing something, having left New York years ago. In Geneva, public servants are highly paid and highly valued. Teachers and judges have excellent salaries, do their work well (the teachers are amazing, performing way beyond the call of duty), and are appreciated and respected. Isn't that "The Way It Spozed To Be" - or does New York now aim for poor service from poorly paid professionals?

Recommend Recommended by 33 Readers

77. CM  
Europe  
July 5th, 2011  
10:20 am

Wow reading these comments tells me that Americans are unbelievably contemptuous of people who try to perform a public service. Paying low salaries is not a way to entice good people and having competent judges is extremely important.

Recommend Recommended by 21 Readers

78. WHIT25  
Durham, NC  
July 5th, 2011  
10:20 am

I would be a judge for 100K / yr. plus benefits. You hear that New York? I will move at my own expense.

You're welcome.

Recommend Recommended by 9 Readers

79. chris  
la jolla, ca  
July 5th, 2011  
10:20 am

First, this is not a small salary! Second, perhaps this is a golden opportunity - have these money-hungry leftist judges leave and replace them with people who have no political agenda and care for justice.

Recommend Recommended by 6 Readers

80. kirwoodm  
Iowa  
July 5th, 2011  
10:20 am

Bottom line, he have to do what is going to makes him happy. My bet is there more issues than the salary causing him to leave. Perhaps internal pressure ??? Nurse's salary in Iowa ranks 50 th in the nation. Somehow we learn to live within our means.

Recommend Recommended by 4 Readers

81. Peter  
LI, NY  
July 5th, 2011  
10:25 am

The article emphasizes a huge distortion in the way professionals are compensated. I have difficulties to comprehend why a judge becoming partner in a law firm can earn \$1.4 million while the same judge earns 10% of the partner compensation. I guess nobody can explain this overnight transformation.

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what's this?

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America has been transformed in a place where there is a huge distortion of legal and financial sectors. Both sectors fight and win against regulation which protects offenders rather than the public and may also put some order in the way a skill or education are compensated. Corporations and Wall Street pay millions to law firms (and their partners) to protect their interest, profits and deregulation while defending those who impoverished millions of Americans. By bringing the best judges and prosecutors into the law firms there will be nobody left to investigate, accuse and honestly judge the offenders.

America holds the record of the highest number of lawyers per capita with the longest and most expensive litigation time. Apparently, there is a trend to make it completely unaffordable to the most of the people and letting the corporations, insurance companies and Wall Street to win by default.

Logically, judges' compensation should be equal or higher than the best paid lawyer or law firm partner. This logic ascertains fair justice and best judges on the bench. Unfortunately, money and manipulations win and logic lost.

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82. Alex  
New York  
July 5th, 2011  
10:25 am

Good luck to the judges getting any type of pay raise in this economic environment. Most regular citizens consider \$144K to be an excellent salary as most of us make far less than that. It'll be hard to sell a pay raise to the public when college tuition rises so much every year and all manner of public services are getting axed. However, I do agree that it sounds as if the judges are grossly underpaid.

When a court officer makes more than the judge--there is something terribly wrong. It is in the public's interest to have judges compensated fairly--but not excessively. These people are in extremely important and trusted positions. If they don't start getting raises, I could see some taking bribes in return for a particular ruling. Bad news.

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83. John  
NJ  
July 5th, 2011  
10:25 am

Is being a judge even comparable to being a partner at a law firm, beyond having the same degree? Sure, one can do the other, but the job is not the same. Also, is the end of the day pay for a partner just salary or profits too?

Unless 'partner' has a different meaning in law, a 'partner' is part owner of the business. So (s)he is more than just an employee. In theory, some of that \$1.4M could be generated from the investment part of being a partner. Granted, one might be required to work at the firm to be a partner, and the ROI might be better at the firm than another investment, but when it comes down to it, some (not sure how much) of what partners take home is investment income, not salary.

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84. Janet  
Brooklyn, NY  
July 5th, 2011  
10:30 am

Public interest lawyers, even those with as many years' experience as most of the judges cited, and with degrees from first-tier law schools, earn about half what the judges do. These lawyers know they've chosen their careers, and don't complain, at least publicly, when their law school friends make high salaries as law firm partners and, sometimes, TV commentators. These judges, on the other hand want the respect which comes from being a judge, with the image of being someone who works for the public good, but without the sacrifices expected by most.

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85. Andrew  
Cambridge,  
Massachusetts  
July 5th, 2011  
10:40 am

Over time if a there is a sustained increase in the number of judges leaving the bench I heartily suggest that a program similiar to Teach for America be initiated to bring new graduates from America's elite law schools (top five law schools preferably)to the bench. You say these graduates fresh out of law school will lack experience and the gravitas that comes with 20 years on the bench? Pshaw! Give them a 6 week course to teach them to be a judge and have them sit in a courtroom for 2 weeks with a senior judge. They will be off and running. Besides these new judges will bring a new perspective and new ideas to the job. Experience is overrated anyway-if you have many

years on the job (teaching and many other professions with the primary exceptions of medicine and law) you are to move aside to make room for a much lower salaried replacement.

Recommend Recommended by 3 Readers

86. Fahey  
WA  
July 5th, 2011  
10:40 am

The process of judicial appointment has become highly politicized and is more partisan than ever. Here, candidates for the bench vie for endorsements by not only the legal profession but also by the local political districts. It has become apparent that appointments are often a form of political pay-off. Public service is diminished and subordinate to interests of power and pay.

"Show me the money!"

Recommend Recommended by 3 Readers

87. Deb Woodpecker  
Albany, NY  
July 5th, 2011  
10:40 am

He thinks \$144,000 is poor? I live on 10% of that in retirement, after 30 years of a solidly middle class career, but I never earned anything close to his salary. How can someone whose thinking is this distorted possibly administer justice for those whose life is so different from his? He's clueless. These judges are only comparing themselves to other lawyers in private practice, not to ordinary citizens, whose lives they can't begin to comprehend. I say, good riddance. We need judges who understand us. Maybe we need fewer money-hungry lawyers on the bench. Where are the people with a conscience?

Recommend Recommended by 7 Readers

88. Keith  
CA  
July 5th, 2011  
10:45 am

Wow. And Megyn Kelly on FoxNews kept telling us that \$250K was barely above the poverty line when it came to restoring responsible tax levels. I can only imagine what FoxNews must be thinking about somebody making only \$144K -- WAY below the FoxNews poverty line.

Amazing how conservatives claim that public workers are being paid more than free market rates, but yet when there are fewer and fewer judges leaving the profession they still claim they're being overpaid. Claiming judges are being overpaid when there is an increasing shortage of them goes entirely contrary to claiming they're being paid above free market rates.

This just continues to point out that conservatives only "believe" in free markets when it suits their purposes. Just like Republicans yelling for "no government interference in the free markets" all while Republicans fight tooth and nail to continuing giving subsidies to Big Oil and other industries that Republicans like.

The stench of lies is worse than Exxon's latest oil spill in the Yellowstone.

Recommend Recommended by 4 Readers

89. Concerned Citizen  
New York, NY  
July 5th, 2011  
10:50 am

I don't think people realize how much of a problem this is. There are two major issues here.

1. The best legal minds will stay in private practice and we'll end up with people who have a marginal understanding of the law on the bench. That hurts both the people and defendants depending on the particular judge.

2. Those judges who cannot get better employment elsewhere and who have questionable morals will be more inclined to decide cases in favor of the person who can pay them more.

I totally understand how the average person would not be inclined to feel anything for someone who is complaining about their 6 figure salary. But in this case it's warranted because it affects all of us.

Recommend Recommended by 5 Readers

90. BPPS  
Puyallup WA

The article states that judges in NY State have not had a raise in 12 years

July 5th, 2011  
10:55 am

and that today a judge earns \$144,000 a year. That is not good pay for someone who has a law degree achieved over many years. At the same time, we know there are law firms where incredible money is paid to the partners and the staff. Many Americans cannot afford a lawyer when one is needed. After expenses, my lawyer, "earned" a little more than what I received from arbitration from an accident totally not my fault. It took over 2 years to come to settlement and I often felt my case had fallen between the cracks. That proved to be so. Many different viewpoints of lawyers. And, lots of concern for Americas future, too, I think. So much anger and resentment expressed in these comments. We should be very concerned. The odds seems to be working against America right now.

Recommend Recommended by 3 Readers

91. Jim  
Minneapolis  
July 5th, 2011  
10:55 am

It seems tragic that private law firm partners make nearly \$2 million per year, which is distorted upwards by their undue leverage and perhaps illegitimate judicial connections. I would first move to decrease the partner payouts by examining their sources of income, and asking whether the related laws are designed for society, or the benefit of said partners. Before raising judicial salaries.

Recommend Recommended by 3 Readers

92. Walter  
Ames, IA  
July 5th, 2011  
11:00 am

"His judicial salary was \$144,000. He stepped down to be a partner at a law firm, Dechert LLP, where average partner pay is \$1.4 million."

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to see that there is something seriously wrong with the system of salary scales. It doesn't make sense that some professions can opt to go to another sector and make 10 times their current salary. Say a McDonald's worker making \$7/hour leaves for a job at Burger King for \$70/hour -- it's not sustainable and neither is a judge jumping ship to make 1.4 million.

Recommend Recommended by 3 Readers

93. C Tweed  
New York, NY  
July 5th, 2011  
11:00 am

Since when is the salary of an "average" worker supposed to be comparable to that of a judge? The resent and envy of some of these comments is extremely disconcerting. A professional who spends years of their life and probably tens of thousands of dollars or more for their education towards earning a degree should be paid accordingly.

And for all those harping on about 144K being enough to live in NYC, you're probably not even from this area. I'm an intern at a large corporation, making over 40K a year so I can totally understand how 144K may not be enough to sustain a household especially after taxes.

Stop with the bitterness about what you're making, or rather not making in comparison, because your job probably does not compare to what these judges are doing day in and day out.

The whole point of this story is that these public officials have been without a raise in 12 years, despite a rising cost of living. In most professions that would be considered a disgrace. If teachers were to strike for not having been paid a raise, there would be far more sympathy most likely. That is ridiculous! These judges are attempting to keep balance and justice in our court systems which I think is no easy feat.

Recommend Recommended by 10 Readers

94. Attygirl  
New York  
July 5th, 2011  
11:05 am

As one of those law clerks making dangerously close to what the judge I work with makes, I can say that most NYC judges are highly committed professionals who only want to be paid commensurate with the cost of living in NYC. They just want cost of living increases so that they can continue to do the job they love and take care of their families. None of the ones I know even own second homes...they are just trying to hang on to the primary residences that they have and educate their children as best they can.

This article portrays those particular jurists in a bad light.

There is so much more to this issue than the short shrift it is given here. NYC Judges work far harder and have much more pressure on them than the average citizen can contemplate. They work under the most unglamorous conditions. They deserve a bit more respect. There are bad apples in any and all professions. The many good judges of NYC have certainly earned the public trust.

That equal branch of government called the legislature has not had any problem giving themselves pay increases over the years, have they? What is wrong with THAT picture, I ask.

Recommend Recommended by 14 Readers

95. beleaguered  
Carlisle  
July 5th, 2011  
11:15 am

Before anyone sheds a tear for allegedly underpaid judges, keep in mind the following: federal Article III judges have lifetime tenure, and even state judges who are elected (as they are in Penna.) have only retention votes to worry about in the future. Judges have no billable hours or difficult clients, and get to hire top law school graduates to research the law and write their opinions. The lawyers who appear before them also do much of the work which the judge can adopt or reject. Plus, most if not all judicial deadlines are self-imposed. Many judges work in chambers that can only be described as palatial. I haven't even mentioned the power and prestige which go along with the job. If you think that the best judges will leave for better pay, you're wrong: the best judges know they have it made.

Recommend Recommended by 6 Readers

96. Andrew  
Cambridge,  
Massachusetts  
July 5th, 2011  
11:20 am

Some readers have indicated that since judges have spent many years of their life (experience is only rewarded for judges and doctors??) on the bench and have spent huge sums of money attending those top 5 law schools that they should be paid accordingly. Ok I get it-the free market only works for very limited professions and a very limited number of individuals. My suggestion is that the raise for judges be prorated in comparison to the raises that the "average" New York State employee has received. If the average state employee has received a 50% percent raise over the 12 year span then judges making twice the amount should get no more than a 25% increase. If they don't like they can walk-they won't find that many opportunities to become partners.

Recommend Recommended by 2 Readers

97. Arc  
Boston  
July 5th, 2011  
11:25 am

The glaring injustice I see from this article is the extreme salaries of some attorneys. Compare this to our current health-care system, where reimbursement is determined by CMS (Medicare/Medicaid) and other health insurance providers. Perhaps, the playing field should be leveled: Legal assistance including private law (contracts, tort, etc.) should be a universal right, like how most view health care now. Legal fees can be regulated through agencies similar to Medicare (Legal-care?), clients (and patients) are not charged by the minute, and those who practice do so for the right reasons, not a fortune. Judges then might not mind being judges.

Recommend Recommended by 4 Readers

98. RC  
Minnesota  
July 5th, 2011  
11:35 am

Our budget problems could be solved by capping all taxpayer-paid salaries throughout the US, including those of judges. If people want to get rich, fine, let them try that in the private sector.

Recommend Recommended by 1 Reader

99. HIGHLIGHT (What's this?)

Diana  
Phoenix, AZ  
July 5th, 2011  
11:40 am

Welcome to the club is all I've got to say. I've been on a pay freeze as a high school English teacher for four years now at \$49,000. And I have to adjunct part time to make the mortgage payments. I work sixty hours a week. If I could leave the profession, I would, but my student loan payments are too high and I've consolidated, so I can't defer them.

I drive a beat-up honda civic that is almost 10 years old. I haven't bought a pair of shoes in a while. I'm afraid to have kids because I don't know how I

could afford them. I can't imagine life at \$60,000, let alone \$80,000. That would completely alter my existence. I know \$144k might not be a lot to the judge, but maybe now people will start to understand the plight of teachers in this country who have to have a master's degree and do an equally difficult job. Once the rich people suffer, then maybe people will start to care

Recommend Recommended by 21 Readers

100. Fang Hsieh  
St. Louis, MO  
July 5th, 2011  
11:45 am

It's difficult to tell from the article whether all of the most talented judges are leaving. I agree with some of the previous posters that pure talent is maybe secondary to a willingness or passion in some cases. I would think part of the lure of being a judge is the independence that comes with the job, where as private practice lawyers have to play by the judges rules.

In the end, I think there are always new people that will be able to fill the empty chairs, and I think the NY judicial system will be just fine. As for the judges that are leaving, I hope they are following more than just money.

Recommend Recommended by 3 Readers

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