

EDITORIAL

Albany lawmakers:

No reforms = No extra \$

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD

It's baaaaack. Seventeen months after a state commission killed a potential pay hike for New York State lawmakers, legislators slipped language into the 2018-19 budget to start another study group. Its composition will be different, but its goal is the same — to examine whether members of the Assembly and Senate, and some executive branch employees, deserve a pay raise.

Lawmakers have been stuck at \$79,500 since 1999.

It's time for an increase. But it comes with a price: better government.

Call it the Honest Day's Pay for an Honest Year's Work Act of 2018.

After New York has watched the long parade of state and local officials on trial for corruption, the problem isn't too few laws defining what's illegal. The problem is what's still legal that breeds shady behavior and works against the delivery of honest government.

This is not a partisan issue. The reunification of Senate Democrats last week puts control of the chamber very much in play this November, so any incumbent wanting to return to Albany next year should be ready now to give voters what they've been demanding.

Here's the deal:

- **For the lawmakers:** full-time work, for a commensurate salary. A figure of \$116,000 has often been mentioned. That seems fair. The job is too important, the work too plentiful and the potential conflicts too many, for part-time legislators who go home in June.

- **A ban on outside income,** or a limit like the 15 percent cap in Congress, with strict penalties for violations. Lawmakers should not be able to leverage their official positions into personal riches.

The pay commission in 2016 killed a raise when legislators rejected a pro-

posal from Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo to tie the hike to a limit or ban on outside income. But that's not what they tell the folks back home. During pre-election endorsement interviews with Newsday's editorial board earlier that fall, only two of Long Island's nine state senators rejected both a ban and limit on outside income: Majority Leader John Flanagan and Elaine Phillips.

- **No more per diem payments** for travel and living expenses. They've been abused for too long. Provide a flat amount that accounts for a district's distance from Albany.

- **No stake, including jobs for family members,** in any nonprofit that gets state funding.

And those mysterious pots of money hidden in the state budget to get dispensed like candy for those in favor? There must be disclosure. Who got the money and for what reason?

- **No more stipends for Senate and Assembly leadership posts** and committee chairs. Congress doesn't have them, nor does the New York City Council.

Term limits on all of these positions. Leadership should be sought because a lawmaker wants to serve New York's

residents in a more critical role and has earned that through his or her actions.

- **No lobbying in Albany** for two years after leaving state government.

- **End the loophole** that lets secretive limited liability companies make big campaign contributions.

- **Restrict how campaign funds are spent** — no personal expenses and no money for defense lawyers.

Once all these reforms are passed, we ask one more thing, in the interest of accountability. Whatever the commission concludes, lawmakers should vote on any pay raise deal.

