

Cut lawmakers' pay?

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'Someone has got to downsize government'

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Now that lawmakers have agreed to raise taxes, many residents are calling for them to cut their own pay and staffs. "There are many states that have half the personnel in their government, and they run just fine," said Carl Knaus of Milford.

"Someone has got to downsize government, downsize the taxing," says Knaus, who plans on supporting any effort to recall lawmakers who voted for a temporary income tax hike and an expansion of the sales tax to services earlier this week.

Lawmakers on Monday voted to raise the income tax from 3.9 percent to 4.35 percent and expand the state's 6 cents-per-dollar sales tax to services that were previously not subject to the tax. But proposals affecting their own health care and pay weren't part of the package. Legislation has been passed by the House that would do away lifetime health benefits for lawmakers and trim their pay by 5 percent. However, the Senate has yet to act on either measure.

Conservatives say they're mobilizing recall efforts against the governor and lawmakers who voted for tax increases, primarily Democrats.

That's an effort that may pick up steam.

"Anyone who voted to increase taxes in Michigan when Michigan is dead last in everything economically is nuts," Knaus said. "The only thing that makes sense is to cut costs."

Some say cost cutting should include scaling back the pay and benefits of state lawmakers.

"A reduction in the size of the state and local bureaucracies should have occurred first," said Ken Huddas of Highland Township.

The state's 110 representatives and 38 senators are paid \$79,650 plus \$12,000 for expenses. They also receive a \$95,500 office allotment.

House and Senate leaders also get additional pay for their leadership roles, according to the Michigan Civil Service Commission's Web site:

House Speaker Andy Dillon, D-Redford, is paid an additional \$27,000 while Senate Majority Leader Mike Bishop, R-Rochester, gets \$26,000 a year in extra pay, according to the state.

The minority leaders in each chamber are paid an extra \$22,000. In the House, the minority leader is Rep. Craig DeRoche, R-Nov. i.

The majority floor leader in both chambers each receive an additional \$12,000, and the minority floor leaders in both chambers each receive \$10,000.

The chairmen of the House and Senate appropriations committees receive \$7,000 in extra pay and the speaker pro tem in both chambers are paid an extra \$5,513.

The pay of state lawmakers is set by the State Officers Compensation Commission, which periodically reviews lawmakers' salaries. The commission's pay recommendations take effect unless lawmakers vote to reject them.

Matt Marsden, a spokesman for Bishop, said the Senate didn't act on the House-passed pay cuts and health care reforms because of the constitutional issue that empowers the SOCC to set pay.

"Given the severity of our budget problems and the timeline we had, it wasn't realistic to include them in our reforms," Marsden said. "We have every intention of taking them up and working them out. It's far more complicated (than other reforms) because it involves the state constitution."

The health care and lawmakers' pay issues are in the Senate's Government Operations Committee.

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