

# Senate should sacrifice as well if it asks others to do so

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By **DAN FAROUGH**

When the Legislature cut a deal on Oct. 1 to resolve the state's budget impasse, we heard repeatedly from Senate Majority Leader Mike Bishop and his caucus on the need for sacrifice. He spoke at length about making deep cuts and reforms.

He led the attack on health and retirement benefits for teachers, public employees and others.

He pushed for deep cuts that would make it much harder for our state's one million uninsured citizens to find health care treatment. He said this was necessary because of tough times. But in all these public statements urging others to sacrifice, there were two reforms that the state senate conveniently forgot -- eliminating their own free lifetime health care and cutting pay for legislators.

Cuts to health care are not easy. Teachers, public employees and Michigan families have had to endure them. But if there are going to be sacrifices from Michigan families to resolve the state's fiscal crisis, is it too much to ask our senators and representatives to share in the sacrifice? We think not.

The opportunity for the Sen. Bishop to lead by example still exists. Two pieces of legislation that would make sure legislators share the pain being asked of Michigan families have been sitting in the Senate chamber since May: HB 4580 and HCR 26.

HB 4580, authored by Rep. Robert Dean, would end the free lifetime health care that legislators receive after just six years of services. As written, this legislation would apply to future lawmakers. While we believe this is an excellent first step, ending this perk should begin with current legislators too.

HCR 26 would recommend to the state agency that sets legislator compensation that a state lawmaker's pay of almost \$80,000 per year should be cut by 5 percent. Both these bills passed the House with overwhelming support from Republicans and Democrats alike.

In response to the public outcry that the Senate failed to cut themselves even while others were being asked to sacrifice, Sen. Bishop says he needs time to "study" the issue. He says (through his spokesperson) that ending free lifetime health care for current legislators is a "gimmick" and may be "unconstitutional." He says he will probably act, but not for awhile and certainly not before the Legislature cuts another \$440 million dollars from the budget

This is not acceptable. It's no "gimmick" for State Senators to share in sacrifice being asked of others.

Legislators make laws. If they need to change laws so they can cut their pay and eliminate their free lifetime health care, then they should do it. If there are constitutional questions, fine -- pass the bills and let this concept have its day in court. But it is wrong to use the Michigan Constitution as a shield against doing what is right.

One Republican state representative, Lorence Wenke, got it right when he told his local paper that the Senate's failure to act on this issue is "greed and cowardice." That's why our organization and many others have launched a pressure campaign at [www.nolansingfreeride.com](http://www.nolansingfreeride.com).

We invite the public to make their voices heard, and force the Senate to share in the sacrifice being asked of others. If it takes public pressure to get the Senate leadership to do what they should do voluntarily, then so be it.

Dan Farough is executive director Progress Michigan, based in Lansing.