

Washington State Standard

Citizen panel says Washington lawmakers deserve a 14% raise

The increase, spread over two years, would push their annual salary north of \$70,000.

BY: [JERRY CORNFIELD](#) - OCTOBER 10, 2024 5:51 PM



Washington's Lt. Gov. Denny Heck asked the Washington Citizens' Commission on Salaries for Elected Officials to increase the pay for the state's lawmakers. He said their current pay is not commensurate with their growing responsibilities. (Jerry Cornfield / Washington State Standard)

State lawmakers in Washington will get a 14% raise over the next two years, pushing their annual pay above \$70,000, under a recommendation adopted Thursday by a citizen salary-setting panel.

Most legislators [currently earn \\$61,997 annually](#). They'd receive a 7% increase on July 1, 2025, bringing their pay to \$66,411 and another 7% a year later, upping their salaries to \$71,126.

Statewide executives and judges will get wage hikes too, though increases settled on by the Washington Citizens' Commission on Salaries for Elected Officials are not quite as hefty.

Washington's nine executives – governor, lieutenant governor, attorney general, secretary of state, state auditor, superintendent of public instruction, insurance commissioner, treasurer and commissioner of public lands – would get a 3% cost of living adjustment next July and another 2% on July 1, 2026. Judges, including state Supreme Court justices, would receive boosts of 4% in July and 3% a year later.

Commissioners made clear they didn't think pay for legislators had kept pace with the growing duties of the elected position and rising costs of living.

Some backed even larger raises after Lt. Gov. Denny Heck and several current and former state lawmakers [addressed the commission Wednesday](#) to make the case for better compensation.

“The members of the Legislature are the board of directors of our 8 million-person state and the entire state workforce,” Heck said. “Simply put, state legislator pay is not commensurate with the magnitude of their responsibilities and the time demands.”

State Sen. Yasmin Trudeau, D-Tacoma, spoke of the challenge of balancing motherhood and public service, noting she would bring her youngest child to the Capitol at different times in the session, including state budget negotiations.

“I didn’t go into public service to make money. The reality is we just take on a lot more,” she said.

Commissioners echoed a concern raised by Trudeau: compensation must be enough so that residents from all walks of life will be interested in serving in the citizen legislature. If salaries are too low, people like working moms, small business owners and young adults will feel they cannot afford to serve.

But commissioners recognized their suggestion of a 14% increase will draw the public’s attention.

“We cannot fix everything overnight, We are going to have to explain this,” said Commissioner Nicholas Lovrich. “This really does help.”

Late Thursday, Heck lauded the commission “for recognizing that the job of being a state legislator is profoundly different from what it once was.”

Weighing in

Voters established the salary commission in 1987 to end the practice of politicians deciding their own pay. Though funded by the state, it operates independent of the legislative, executive and judicial branches.

Its [17 unpaid members](#) include residents randomly selected from the state’s 10 congressional districts plus representatives of business, organized labor and higher education. Also represented are the legal and human resources professions.

Every two years this panel comes together to consider salary changes. Commissioners are supposed to base decisions on the duties of the job — not the man or woman doing it at the time. They don't have to give any raises, but they cannot lower the salary of anyone in office.

Commissioners will spend the next four months [gathering public comment](#) on their recommended raises. Public hearings, to be held in-person and virtually, are planned Nov. 14 in Port Angeles, Dec. 11 in Vancouver, and Jan. 8 in Ocean Shores. A final hearing is set for Feb. 5 in Tumwater, at which the commission could revise the schedule before taking final action.

Elected officials and judges cannot alter what the commission approves.

- [DENNY HECK](#)
- [WASHINGTON CITIZENS' COMMISSION ON SALARIES FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS](#)
- [WASHINGTON SALARY COMMISSION](#)
- [YASMIN TRUDEAU](#)



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