

# State panel bumps up pay for lawmakers, governor and judges

Other statewide officeholders will get increases too. Tim Eyman vows to give voters a chance to block them.

By [Jerry Cornfield](#)

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OLYMPIA — State lawmakers are set to get a nearly 17 percent pay raise this summer.

And salaries for governor, the eight other statewide executives and hundreds of judges are climbing as well, courtesy of action Monday by the independent citizen commission that decides pay scales for the state's legislative, executive and judicial branches.

In a series of votes, the Washington Citizens' Commission on Salaries for Elected Officials agreed to boost the base pay of every position and, on top of that, provide a cost-of-living adjustment of 2 percent each year. Overall, the increases are slightly lower than initially discussed in October.

Lawmakers' annual earnings will climb 16.7 percent, going from the current \$48,731 to \$52,766 on July 1, 2019, and \$56,881 the following July. Leaders of the four caucuses will continue to earn more because they receive a stipend for added responsibilities.

For elected members of the executive branch, the proposed two-year increases ranged from 5.8 percent for Gov. Jay Inslee to 13 percent for Lt. Gov. Cyrus Habib.

Gov. Jay Inslee, who now earns \$177,107 a year, will make \$182,179 in the next fiscal year and \$187,353 in mid-2020, the final year of his second term. He is pondering a run for president. The increase is the smallest percentage approved by the panel.

Habib, who is in his first term as lieutenant governor, is now paid a base salary of \$103,937. The pay hike approved by commissioners will push his earnings to \$111,180 this summer and up to \$117,300 in 2020.

In addition, Habib receives extra pay when he assumes the role of acting governor when Inslee is out of state. That's been often as the governor traveled a lot in 2018 to fulfill duties as leader of the Democratic Governors Association and this year as he explores a run for president.

Senate Minority Leader Mark Schoesler, R-Ritzville, raised this point in a letter urging commissioners not to give Habib a salary increase.

"This convenient perk provides him with a 70 percent salary bonus every time he performs this largely ceremonial duty," Schoesler wrote.

The largest proposed increases will be enjoyed by those in the judicial branch. This includes judges serving in district and superior courts, courts of appeal, and the Supreme Court. Commissioners are seeking to align their pay schedule more closely with the federal judicial branch.

Under the proposal, the salary of Chief Justice Mary Fairhurst of the state Supreme Court, which is now \$193,162, would climb to \$213,773 next year and \$223,499 in 2020. Chief Justice John Roberts of the U.S. Supreme Court now earns \$267,000.

Associate justices on the state high court would earn \$220,562 in 2020 compared to the \$255,300 now paid to their federal counterparts.

Salary increases will take effect unless blocked through referendum.

Conservative anti-tax activist Tim Eyman, who has crusaded for months against the raises, vowed Monday to try and get this issue in front of voters.

Commissioners "handed out salary bonuses like candy today," he said in a statement. "They listened to the politicians' pleas and ignored the people. But all they did was pour gasoline on the fire of enthusiasm for our Give Them Nothing referendum."

To force a statewide vote, he'll need to turn in at least 129,811 valid signatures of registered voters. The deadline is 90 days after the new salary schedule is filed with the state.

There's never been a successful referendum since voters took the job of setting salaries out of the hands of the legislators in 1986 and entrusted it to this independent commission. Referendum petitions did get filed with the secretary of state in 1987 by Ed Phillips, of Mossyrock, and in 1991 by Michael Cahill, of Walla Walla. Neither man submitted signatures.

Adjustments to the level of pay of elected members of the state's executive, legislative and judicial branches are considered every two years by the panel. Its members include a resident randomly selected from each of the state's 10 congressional districts, plus representatives from business, organized labor, higher education, the legal world and human resources.

Voters established the commission in 1987 to prevent politicians from deciding their own pay. Its work is funded with state tax dollars but the commission operates independently of the three branches of state government.

Commissioners are supposed to base their decisions on the duties of the job — not the individual doing it at the time nor any of the perks associated with it. They can compare figures with what other states pay for similar posts. They don't have to give raises, but they cannot lower the salary of anyone in office. By law, elected officials cannot reject a pay hike.

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*This story has been modified to show the correct salaries and proposed raises for members of the state Supreme Court.*

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