



READERS' COMMENTS

Pay Frozen, More New York Judges Leave Bench [Back to Article](#)

By WILLIAM GLABERSON

The state's judges, who have not had a raise in 12 years, are resigning in relatively large numbers, not to retire but to return to practicing law.

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214 Readers' Comments

ALL COMMENTS HIGHLIGHTS READERS' RECOMMENDATIONS

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26. suzy NJ July 5th, 2011 9:20 am 12 years without a raise is disgraceful. All the folks who begrudge judges a salary comparable with their position in the justice system just don't get the importance of their work. It's never good when people who are the best and the brightest leave an important job because they can't make a decent living. \$144,000 is not a lot of money in NYC, especially for people with years of education and experience in a field that affects the lives of so many people.

Recommend Recommended by 34 Readers

27. July 5th, 2011 9:20 am This comment has been removed. Comments are moderated and generally will be posted if they are on-topic and not abusive. For more information, please see our Comments FAQ.

28. HIGHLIGHT (What's this?) Andrew Lee Philadelphia, PA July 5th, 2011 9:20 am It seems many folks are missing the point. Whether one considers \$100K+ to be "a lot of money" or not, it's the question of whether we want the best and the brightest on the bench. My goal isn't to get the lowest bidder on the bench, but rather the most qualified who also want to serve on the bench.

American society seems to have answered the question with respect to teachers, and the answer is clearly that we really don't care about having the best and the brightest teaching our kids - we do not want our smartest and most educated to go into the K-12 teaching profession, as wages, prestige, and the other "trappings" that we use to mark professional success are tied to other, more lucrative professions. Sure, we'd prefer good teachers over bad, but we demand the people who teach do so for whatever wage we've determined we're collectively willing to pay for. With incentives and "recognition" like that, is it any wonder few if any people coming out of engineering school or with degrees in the hard sciences, economics, or business never even considers teaching K-12...

We as a society also seem to be on that same course now with judges. When the best and the brightest attorneys can make 10X (again, not just double, or triple, but ten times) in the private sector, without having to worry about court under-staffing, longer hours and greater caseload with judicial cutbacks without commensurate compensation or even recognition, then we're looking at the potential imminent collapse of qualified jurists from the bench. And if we truly value justice in our courts, how can we not want the

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Public service is public service, it shouldn't necessarily financially reward people more than folks in the private sector, but there should be some level of overall parity, so that the best and the brightest might indeed decide to serve as administrators, teachers, and yes, judges.

Recommend Recommended by 94 Readers

29. browa4
home
July 5th, 2011
9:25 am

if the law firms can support incomes in excess of 900,000 then they can also support escalated court fees. law firms wishing to try or defend cases in said courts should have to pay a 'facility fee' to sustain a substantial fund allowing judicial salaries and those of public defenders to keep pace with reality. This is a fixable problem.

Recommend Recommended by 10 Readers

30. Sheldon Bunin
Jackson Heights,
New York
July 5th, 2011
9:35 am

Before I retired I was a trial lawyer in the local courts, state and federal for close to 40 years. Yes, there are political hacks, bloated egos, nasty judges, some who could not care less about the right outcome or following the law. Dealing with such judges, even those who always take one side or another, is part of the professional trial lawyer's job and such judges are in the minority. Some counties are far worse than others. But that is not the story. Most judges I have found are reasonably fairminded, open to a good legal argument, evenhanded at trial and knowledgeable of the applicable law. Most, not all, treat lawyers with respect and they remember which lawyers are straight shooters and those who are liars and those who are tricksters. Many are exceedingly practical and know how a close the settlement gap. On the civil side they are there to resolve disputes. I remember trying a commercial case before a jury and the parties were negotiating in the back of the room. The judge during a short break called me up and asked where the parties were. I reported back they were \$500 apart in a case involving many thousands. The judge said these guys are not trying up her court and wasting a jury for \$500. Spit the difference I am ordering this case settled. My client asked can she do that. No but she can declare a mistrial and adjourn the case for a year. The case was marked ordered settled. In the main these judges do what they were sent to the bench to do and their salaries should be tied to the salaries of state legislators who only work part time. What is the use of merit appointments if taking a judgeship pays less than a law firm associate?

Recommend Recommended by 15 Readers

31. Michael D. Houst
Barrington, NH
July 5th, 2011
9:40 am

A judge earning \$144,000 a year is making 30% more than my wife and I combined. I hold a Masters degree, she holds a Bachelors, both of us work in our professions. I don't begrudge a judge that amount. It's fair compensation for having to make decisions about people's lives, and for wallowing in the bottom half of human behavior.

Yet the article claims that lawyers earn ten times that amount. \$1,440,000 per year arguing cases. Such a condition is ripe for corruption of judges. Such a condition begs the question of whether lawyers are acting in an ethical and moral manner. The power that trial lawyers have, and the income they claim, cries out for reduction, for curtailment. What they gain in compensation is inequitable. They prey upon the populace, and control the arena in which they combat us, an arena that is never a fair and level playing field for the average citizen.

Since lawyers produce even less of tangible benefit to society than any other

group, including CEOs, perhaps it's time that they be suitably taxed to bring them more in line with those they supposedly service.

Recommend Recommended by 12 Readers

32. Marcus Jackson
New Orleans
July 5th, 2011
9:40 am

Actually the more telling issue revealed by this article, to which most respondents seem oblivious, is the obscenely high rate of remuneration of lawyers--from \$950,000-\$1.4 million at the large firms (meaning many lawyers)--a clear index of how distorted are our social and economic values. Here we are at a moment in our history when communities cannot afford to pay teachers, police, or firemen (average wages about \$50-60,000 if they are lucky). See today's article on Wilminbgton, NC as but one example of our national decline. Instead, our economy has to bear the hidden cost of thousands of attorneys--who produce no actual wealth to the economy and contribute little if anything to the quality of life. The distortion is so great that even those are willing to serve the public as judges no longer can afford to. The national decline driven by private greed continues unabated and has infected even our universities.

Recommend Recommended by 21 Readers

33. Tony
New York, NY
July 5th, 2011
9:40 am

Failing to pay judges enough means that quality lawyers won't become judges, and thus, the quality of the judiciary plummets. Currently, judges make less than first year associates at large law firms, i.e., people who have yet to find out whether or not they passed the bar. While we can argue that the first year associates are overpaid, what it means is that the marketplace is willing to pay experienced jurists a fair amount of money, and certainly more than they would make from the bench. Their salaries should be raised accordingly.

Recommend Recommended by 14 Readers

34. TDHawkes
Eugene, Oregon
July 5th, 2011
9:40 am

This seems the difference between public-interest and profit-interest motives. Public servants have always made less than their for-profit counterparts. What I find interesting is 1) the notion that a judge SHOULD be able to have two homes; 2) a judge cannot support two children on ~\$130,000 a year. Excuse me? If someone cannot support two children on \$130,000 a year, there is something wrong with their financial skills. 3) The blanket assumption that unshackled greed is the best we can hope for from our public servants and private business people.

Recommend Recommended by 7 Readers

35. Peter
New York
July 5th, 2011
9:45 am

The people who operate the subway, drive the buses, and sweep the streets have more of an impact on public lives than judges. Let's see these cry babies try to make a living on the salaries of these true public servants.

The nerve of Emily Jane Goodman's complaint that she has to sell her second home in the Hamptons, of all places, underscores how out of touch judges are with the rest of the society they are sworn to serve. She should be ashamed of herself, but I am afraid that she really is the face of the bench in New York, if not the entire country. Her arrogance is par for the course, sadly.

Society does not need to fear when these racketeers leave since there are plenty of other young pups willing and able to wear their robes. It is, after all, a very cushy job, where all the heavy lifting and thinking is left to judicial clerks. And it isn't as if we are losing their "experience" and "wisdom" since the people who are appointed to the bench tend to be

people couldn't hack it in the private sector to begin with. Lawyers and judges love to think that what they do is all so important when in fact they are the biggest contributor to society's ills with the kind of rackets they set up and operate. The judicial system tends to be a self-serving, quasi-criminal enterprise anyway, which anyone who can read a book is qualified to practice.

Was this article supposed to produce a ground swell of support for these leeches, or create a diatribe like my own? When everyone in the public service sector who really touches public lives is paid what they are worth, then more people might begin to take these judges seriously. It is a mock problem for judges who really serve only a few anyway. Not to fear, there will be vermin to take their place. Good riddance to bad rubbish.

Recommend Recommended by 6 Readers

36. Retired combat vet
America
July 5th, 2011
9:47 am

Don't let the door hit him on the way out.

Recommend Recommended by 7 Readers

37. JFK in queens
Queens
July 5th, 2011
9:47 am

In some sense it is unfair that any profession can be forced to accept a frozen pay/compensation rate for so long. However you lose me when you whine about having to sell the house in the Hamptons...I know you, you have earned what you have but if your making a case to the people, put it in terms that are not insulting to our own situations.

Recommend Recommended by 9 Readers

38. John Jaros
Philadelphia, PA
July 5th, 2011
9:47 am

Let them quit!!! Most workers earn less than half of their salaries. While workers across the country are being laid-off or forced to take pay/benefits cuts, it is disgusting that judges are complaining about their pay. Let them live like the rest of us!

Recommend Recommended by 6 Readers

39. Michael Branagan
Silver Spring, MD
July 5th, 2011
9:47 am

"The salaries of state trial judges nationally rose 34 percent to a median of \$116,100 in the decade ending in 2005. But during the same period, the median partners' share of profits at large law firms jumped 141 percent to \$957,500 ..."

A good comparison, if only the article discussed whether partner pay was too little or ... way too much.

Recommend Recommended by 3 Readers

40. HIGHLIGHT (What's this?)

JD Gold
Brooklyn, NY
July 5th, 2011
9:48 am

The point is not that judges expect to take home private sector salaries, that is obviously unrealistic. The point is that by neglecting judicial salaries for so long, the legislature has made money an issue to people who had willingly forgone greater lucre years ago by deciding to go into public service. If you think it is "all about the money" as some commenters suggest, then how would you account for anybody taking a judgeship position that pays LESS THAN THE STARTING SALARIES FOR FIRST YEAR ASSOCIATES at most major law firms. IT IS AN INSULT. These are lifelong professionals who should have a realistic expectation of making a decent living. Most people have no idea what the work and lifestyle burden on a state trial court judge is. The vast majority of those who serve at this level are dedicated public servants who have spent years climbing to

positions of prominence and respect within their profession.

The case load that these judges must take on is ever-increasing, and while they struggle to keep up with greater demands on their time and stamina, they are treated like hangers -on by the hopelessly incompetent, puerile and generally corrupt state legislature, who actually hold judicial pay raises as a bargaining chip for trying to increase their own salaries (a point this article fails to mention).

Meanwhile, I challenge anyone posting glib and dismissive comments on this board to ask themselves, if they were standing trial for a crime, or defending against a lawsuit that could change their financial lives, would they want somebody who is an experienced professional and servant who has made significant sacrifices in order to serve justice or some place-holder from the bottom of the pile?

The comparison to other civil servants is especially inappropriate. Judges work year-round, have much higher professional pressure and expectations, and deal in higher stakes. They also have extensive ethics rules that prevent them from procuring alternative income.

Recommend Recommended by 106 Readers

41. jck
nj
July 5th, 2011
9:48 am

If the salary is "Medicaid" rates, there will be no judges.

Recommend Recommended by 3 Readers

42. PRESIDENT
MERV
New York City
July 5th, 2011
9:48 am

As most of the comments to this article indicate, few people care about the financial plight of the judiciary. To many of the readers here, judges are overpaid hacks. Yet if any of them had a case in court, they would be looking to the judge for fair, knowledgeable, and efficient handling of the case. Whatever happened to "you get what you pay for." Put in context, judges have had their earning power diminished dramatically while attorneys and court staff saw substantial increases in their incomes the past 12 years. Judges are bitter and depressed. Some have sought supplemental, menial employment. Others, as this article suggests, are leaving the bench. The pool of people replacing them consists of less talented attorneys who have not been financially successful. Who would want to take a substantial cut in pay to become an unappreciated judge? So to those of you who don't care about judges' pay, good luck finding a judge who cares about you when you have to go to court.

Recommend Recommended by 18 Readers

43. You Disgust Me
D-Town NC
July 5th, 2011
9:49 am

I made \$5,600 last year and am 23 years old. I can not receive govt. aid until next year for school because my step-dad makes too much money (50,000 in a really good year) of which I see maybe \$2,000. If I can be an off campus college student and make it off of ,at most, 8,000 per year than I am sure that 144,000 is more than enough to get by. If you can not live off of 144,000 in comfort than you have some serious problems that a pay raise can not help you with. Judges are paid far too much for the job that they do. The most that any judge should make is 50,000. Paying an un-appreciative judge 144,000 to do a job should have an average pay range around 35 - 40 is a disgusting waste of resources. So please, leave the bench... some one should have kicked you off of it a long time ago.

Recommend Recommended by 8 Readers

44. suzc
Colorado
July 5th, 2011
9:49 am

The question should not be, Is \$144,000 to small a salary for a judge. (Maybe Yes in NYC but No in most places.) The question should be, Who in the world thinks any lawyer is worth \$1.4M a year? A second question might

be, If judges no longer get any respect, could that possibly be because of the activist judges on the Roberts Corporate Supreme Court?

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 11 Readers

45. Dave Klaman
Glen Cove, NY
July 5th, 2011
9:49 am

That's a great way to keep only the worst--Just lower the salaries.

This way, justice in NY can be meted out by ultra wealthy crony judges who don't need to take a salary, or perhaps ones who will be looking to supplement their income from under the table. It's just another great example of Republican penny wise, pound foolish policy.

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 10 Readers

46. Stip
LI, NY
July 5th, 2011
9:49 am

If you think you're not being paid fairly for your work, find another job. Its that simple. I'm sure they'll find others to fill the postitions.

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 3 Readers

47. Summertime and
the Livin' is Easy
O.J
July 5th, 2011
9:49 am

Judges display their true color - green.

..Show me the money !

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 3 Readers

48. Michael Thomas
Sawyer MI
July 5th, 2011
9:49 am

I'm a retired attorney. This story is ridiculous. Many, many, very qualified attorneys will always be available, especially in the present job market , to fill whatever number of judicial vacancies occur. Additionally, your numbers about earnings of private practice attorneys appears to be made up. i can assure you that average partners are not pulling down anywhere close to a million dollars annually. Not even close. Not even if limited to New York. The Times should print a retraction of the purported salary information in this article. Absolutely ridiculous !

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 9 Readers

49. Bruce
New York City
July 5th, 2011
9:49 am

They should try TV.

I read that Judge Judy is paid \$45m per year.

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 2 Readers

50. Independent
Argyle, TX
July 5th, 2011
9:49 am

Don't let the door hit you on the way out!

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 6 Readers

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