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The Fray: Panel sets hearing on raising state lawmakers' pay

A newly formed commission that will likely award New York's state senators and Assembly members their first raises since 1999 has scheduled a public hearing in New York City next week as it begins its work.

The seven-member, appointed panel also will be looking at salary increases for the governor and other statewide elected officials; management employees in the administration; and state judges. Gov. Andrew Cuomo and state lawmakers approved the creation of the New York State Commission on Legislative, Judicial and Executive Compensation as part of the budget this year; the governor, legislative leaders and chief judge of the state Court of Appeals later chose the members.

The commission will hold its hearing at 11 a.m. on Nov. 30 at the midtown offices of the New York City Bar Association.

Under the law that formed it, the commission will make its pay recommendations next November, after the next state elections. Whatever it suggests will take effect the following January unless state lawmakers reject or change the proposal.

State lawmakers, whose annual sessions in Albany last for six months, receive a base salary of \$79,500, although most also get stipends for party leadership positions and for serving as committee chairmen or ranking minority members on committees. Among the 11 legislators representing Orange, Ulster and Sullivan counties, those stipends range from \$9,000 to \$25,000. (Only Assemblyman James Skoufis, D-Woodbury, doesn't have a stipend-earning title, known in Albany as a "lulu".)

Two of the region's senators — William Larkin Jr., R-Cornwall-on-Hudson, and John Bonacic, R-Mount Hope — also collect their state pensions on top of their salaries and stipends. The addition of the pension brings total compensation to \$163,000 for Larkin and \$156,500 for Bonacic.

On a related note, Bonacic led his colleagues from Orange, Ulster and Sullivan in expenses charged for travel, meals and overnight stays in Albany in 2015, according to data the comptroller's office provided for lawmaker reimbursements through Sept. 20, after this year's session and the bulk of lawmakers' trips to Albany had ended. He had billed the state for almost \$16,000 in expenses through that date, about the same amount as he had last year. Close behind were freshman Assemblyman Karl Brabenec and longtime Assemblyman Kevin Cahill, each of whom had about \$14,000 in total expenses.

Chris McKenna

Maloney sides with GOP on refugee screening bill

Rep. Sean Patrick Maloney was one of 47 Democrats who joined nearly all House Republicans Thursday in passing a bill that would impose new requirements on the screening of Syrian refugees before they can come to the U.S., a reaction to recent terrorist attacks in Paris.

The Cold Spring Democrat said beforehand during a conference call with reporters on an unrelated topic that he had faith in the government's screening practices and saw no reason why the administration can't certify that it has investigated each refugee, as the bill requires it do. "I don't think it's unreasonable to ask the administration to certify their own process," he said.

The bill passed, 289-137, with 242 Republicans and 47 Democrats in support, and 135 Democrats and two Republicans in opposition. In a statement after the vote, Maloney straddled the political divide on the issue by condemning politicians who have "turned their backs on refugees" while supporting the Republicans' demand that three administration officials guarantee that each refugee poses no threat.

"It's understandable that people are scared, and Americans have a right to know that the process we use to screen refugees will keep us safe," Maloney said. "I have faith in our system, and I don't believe these refugees — the overwhelming majority of whom are women, elderly, and children — threaten our communities or national security. So instead of slowing the program or pausing it, the Administration should agree to immediately certify refugees if they pass the current extensive screenings and we should all refocus on actual threats."

Chris McKenna

Monroe Democratic chairman rips "disloyalty" claim

Monroe Democratic Chairman Tom Kemnitz has issued a scathing response to town Councilman Dan Burke's accusations of disloyalty against fellow Democrats who withdrew the party's endorsement of Burke shortly before the Nov. 3 election.

In a six-page statement, Kemnitz traces deep divisions in the town Democratic Committee to Supervisor Harley Doles' unsuccessful bid for state Senate in 2010, lists town employees with links to Burke and other officials, and scorns the notion that Democrats must support Burke "no matter what actions he takes."

"The question is: who is disloyal, and to what?" the statement concludes. "If being a Democrat is merely a label without any other meaning, then Dan Burke might be your man. If being a Democrat has a meaning rooted in beliefs and actions, then he is not likely your man. At any rate, a majority of the Democratic Committee of the Town of Monroe did not think that he should be our man. In fact, it is likely that they would hold Dan Burke as disloyal to much of what we hold dear as Democrats."