Fact Check: New York legislators did not just vote a pay raise during the coronavirus shutdown

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The claim: New York state lawmakers voted to raise their pay during the state shutdown over the coronavirus

A posting on Facebook by a candidate for the New York state Legislature claimed lawmakers voted themselves a pay raise during the coronavirus crisis.

Vic Furman, president of the Land Owner Advocates of New York, posted on April 27: "While NY is shut down NYS Legislators gave Cuomo and themselves the largest Pay raise in History. All while screaming NY is broke"

Furman, a community activist in Chenango Forks, New York, is one of four candidates running in the Republican primary for the New York Assembly from the 122nd legislative district, about 140 miles southwest of Albany.

In January 2019, the Legislature did receive the first of a three-stage raise, which was approved by a temporary committee, the New York State Compensation Committee in 2018. Planned raises for 2020 and 2021 have been blocked by the courts.

Under a 2015 law, the state Commission on Legislative, Judicial & Executive Compensation was already scheduled to meet later this year to decide whether state lawmakers should get an additional pay raise over the next four years.

Lawmakers last saw their base pay increased from $79,500 to $110,000 in 2019, the first pay raise in 20 years. The increases in 2020 and 2021 – now blocked – would have bumped up the total to $130,000.

A salary increase for Gov. Andrew Cuomo, which was recommended by a state Compensation Committee, was approved by the Legislature in its 2019 budget. The measure calls for Cuomo's salary to increase to $225,000 in 2020 and $250,000 in 2021, which would likely make him the highest-paid governor in the nation.

On April 3, during the coronavirus crisis, the Legislature approved a $177 billion budget that included a measure allowing the committee to also consider judicial salaries this year, but that did not involve legislative raises.

The committee's recommendations take effect unless the legislature steps in to change them via law.

A misleading claim?

In response to an inquiry about his Facebook post, Furman told USA TODAY on May 1 that he had "no intent to mislead" and would clarify his position. He emphasized that pay increases were being carried out during a budget crunch.

"While millions of Americans in NY are left without income, with the present budget crisis, at the very least our Albany Leaders should have set the example and put the raises on hold," he added in a written statement.

"There is no way that the budget shortfall was not already in play before the 2019 budget was adopted," Furman writes. "There is no reason an Executive order from the Governor could not have been suspended. The proof of this is in the politics of Albany as Cuomo said no raises until the 2019 budget was passed in a timely manner without saying a time frame."

"My Facebook statement is based on the fact that during this national emergency our leaders in Albany decided to line their pockets on the backs of taxpayers IN 2020 when the other option was to suspend their raises until we are all getting a paycheck.

Our ruling: False

The New York legislature did not vote to raise the salaries for lawmakers or Gov. Andrew Cuomo during the just completed session in the midst of the statewide shutdown. This is FALSE.

Our fact-check sources:

The Democrat & Chronicle, April 1, 2019
The Democrat & Chronicle, December 2018
The Associated Press
Spectrum News
The New York Times
WBNG