

Ms. Nicki Neal, Commission Secretary
State Officers Compensation Commission
State of Alaska
Box 110201, Juneau, AK 99811-0201

RE: Public Comment - Supporting Increased Legislative Compensation

Dear Commissioners:

I would like to comment on the issue of state executive and legislative compensation. I do so as a 20-year legislative employee, having worked for Republicans and Democrats, House members and Senators, majority and minority members, and both urban and rural legislators. I also have an entrepreneurial background, having been an owner / manager of a telephone equipment manufacturing company with an employee base of 600 individuals.

I hope to focus on compensation for legislators, but would briefly comment on increased compensation for eligible executive branch employees. In their case, I would recommend an effective date for any authorized raise to coincide with the next incoming administration. It's much better public policy not to provide raises to currently-serving public-sector executives, especially since the current group came in at considerably higher salaries than their counterparts in the previous administration.

Regarding state legislators, there is a unique character to their public service which does not prevail in the other two branches of government. Their service value to the public is predicated upon popular opinion, and for which the value of their skills, schooling, and certifications varies in worth among the constituency. Compensation for legislative service is hardly market-inspired such as it is for professionals in the judiciary and executive branches.

Compensation in the judiciary and executive branches is driven in large measure by competitive job market considerations for appropriate skills, schooling, certifications, and the like. Examples would be the professional requirements demanded of lawyers, medical professionals, and certified public accountants. Where the judiciary and executive branches are concerned, adjustments to their compensation packages are comparatively subdued and rarely newsworthy.

The process for legislative compensation, by contrast, is much more discretionary and of interest to the public. Legislators are left to try to determine their own compensation during a legislative session with considerable media attention, and usually to an unsympathetic audience. Such efforts are

intimidating and counter-productive. This commission provides a plausible, workable process, and I hope you will meet with success.

My recommendations would be the following: To raise the level of legislative salary from the current Range 10 to a Range 28, which is entry-level pay for departmental commissioners. I believe that with well-paid professionals in the ranks of the judiciary and executive branches, that the legislative branch too, should compensate its office holders somewhat comensurately. Further, I would authorize leave accumulation, eliminate the Long Term Per Diem during the interim, and reduce the annual office allowances to \$5,000 for both House and Senate members.

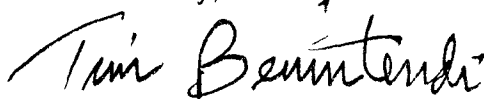
Under these recommendations, the public would exercise its value judgment during each election cycle, as to whether or not a legislator is meeting expectations.

I do not feel that my recommendation affronts the notion of "citizen-legislator." I have never seen this term seriously defined, and while it was a concern to the state's founding fathers, I am not of the opinion that a salary of over \$100,000 would greatly segregate elected legislators from their constituencies in this day and time.

Unfortunately, in the past three years, we have seen what impacts an inadequate compensation package, in part, can mean for some legislators. We have also seen legislators substantially improve compensation for represented state employees and legislative branch employees. I believe it is now time to balance the scales by realistically compensating state legislators themselves.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important public issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tim Benintendi". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a small loop at the end of the last name.

Tim Benintendi
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Anchorage, AK 99524

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