



Judges, elected officials in line for raises

Pay increases first for many since '95

By **MARSHA SHULER**

Advocate Capitol News Bureau

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Schoolteachers and state employees aren't the only people in line for pay raises as a result of actions in the 2007 Legislature.

A lot of other public officials can expect more pay, including judges, statewide elected officials and registrars of voters.

Lawmakers gave the green light to the pay-raise bills that in some instances allow elected officials' compensation to increase by 30 percent or more.

"I guess it was just because the money was there and they could smell it," said Barry Erwin, president of the Council for a Better Louisiana, a nonprofit membership group of businesses that follows state government.

"When you have all these elected officials, you want them to work on your side during these campaigns, especially sheriffs," Erwin said.

Gov. Kathleen Blanco cleared the way for parish assessors and clerks of court to raise their pay, signing into law two bills approved by lawmakers.

The other officials are just one stroke of the governor's pen away from getting raises.

Money to cover the judges' and statewide officials' pay is state government's responsibility.

Assessors, clerks of court, registrars and sheriffs receive their pay increases from local taxes and fees.

Public Affairs Research Council president Jim Brandt said there was “no consistency, no logic” in how the pay raises were decided.

Brandt specifically mentioned the “strange” law that links sheriffs’ pay to that of judges. One of the better moves came this session when the Legislature decided to end the law in 2010, he said.

Brandt said the pay raises for statewide officials in the \$30,000 range were warranted because the salaries had not changed since 1995. The employees of many of the state’s highest elected officials receive substantially more compensation than their bosses.

Blanco has signed into law:

- House Bill 467, which would allow the East Baton Rouge Parish assessor’s pay to rise to \$108,290 from its current \$80,000 per year. The bill installs a three-tier salary schedule based on parish population. Salaries for assessors in smaller parishes would increase to \$98,290 or \$88,290. Current salaries start at \$60,000.
- House Bill 210, which would allow some clerks of court salaries to jump to more than \$100,000 annually. Clerks in districts of fewer than 50,000 people could make up to \$88,000; districts from 50,000 to 200,000 up to \$98,000; and any clerks from larger districts up to \$108,000 annually. Current maximum salaries range from \$65,000 to \$90,000 depending on parish size.

Other bills approved by the Legislature and awaiting the governor’s decision-making are:

- House Bill 489, which would provide the next governor a \$35,000 pay increase. Six other statewide elected officials would get \$30,000 more than current pay. The governor’s pay would increase from \$95,000 to \$130,000, beginning Jan. 14, 2008. Statewide officials’ pay would jump from \$85,000 to \$115,000. Included are the lieutenant governor, secretary of state, treasurer, attorney general, and commissioners of agriculture and insurance. It’s the first compensation change for the officials since 1995.
- House Bill 974 would guarantee Louisiana’s judges and parish sheriffs pay raises through the 2010 fiscal year. The officials’ pay would increase by more than \$20,000 over the period. Louisiana’s sheriffs aren’t mentioned in the pay raise bill, but the law covering sheriffs’ pay ties it to judicial salaries. Today, Supreme Court justices are paid \$125,425 by the state; appeals court judges, \$118,995; and district judges, \$112,764. As HB974 passed, the Legislature decided to “de-link” the judges and sheriffs pay after 2010.
- Senate Bill 103 would raise the pay scale according to population for registrars of voters, their chief deputies and assistants. In the largest parishes, with populations of at least 200,001, the maximum pay would be \$115,507 for registrars.