



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.

Comments are no longer being accepted.

214 Readers' Comments

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1. HIGHLIGHT (What's this?)

I have a hard time feeling sorry for anyone making \$144K a year (plus presumably generous public sector benefits - including a pension). If they make that and are crying poor, maybe they shouldn't be making the decisions that a judge makes. If they want to go back to private practice, fine - there's nothing wrong with that, but it makes it obvious that it is all about the money.

Recommend Recommended by 137 Readers

2. ezrdbg Bronx, New York July 5th, 2011 7:34 am

Good riddance to Judge McGuire, the most unprofessional judge of have ever had the displeasure of seeing on any court. Frankly, the racial overtones of his manner in court leaves one to think that he considers jury awards to be "welfare." No one is a greater recipient of corporate welfare then Judge McGuire, a political and later judicial hack whose politics entered into his decisions. He was overpaid at \$144,000.00 yearly, it was a good salary, and I can only hope that he does not darken the steps of the doorsteps of any courtrooms in the future.

Recommend Recommended by 48 Readers

3. diverx99 new york July 5th, 2011 7:54 am

Judgeships in NY State are not "rewards" for long legal careers. In most of the State and ESPECIALLY in NY City they are handed out by party bosses as kickbacks to party hacks for years of service (if we are lucky), or simply for cash (bundled campaign contributions).

Anyone who is willing to lay out enough time and money can buy a judgeship. Once they get their black robes judges wonder why they are held in contempt by their partners in crime in the legislature.

"There is perhaps no more fitting finale to a long legal career than a judgeship. Ascending the bench after years appearing before it can bring power, respect, personal satisfaction, reasonable hours and, often, free parking."

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what's this?

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4. Noo Yawka
NewYork, NY
July 5th, 2011
7:54 am

I just love how we all whine and moan about public salaries and calling it government waste, etc..., without any intelligent consideration for what our public employees are actually worth for the jobs they do.

It would be a lesson to us all if every single Judge would go back to the private sector and earn a living commensurate with their respective levels of expertise and abilities, and leave no one to administrate justice. The public would get what it deserves then.

No one, but no one, seeks a judgeship to get rich. The level of commitment to the position is much, much beyond that. One, however, still needs to put food on the table, and we, as a society, should make some sort of level headed attempt to recognize that.

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5. Freedom Fighter
Las Vegas
July 5th, 2011
7:54 am

Lawyers becoming Judges simply for the money is not good for the overall society. Unfortunatley this is a trend of the so-called professionals which also include doctors, dentists and accountants.

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6. Joe Gould
The Village
July 5th, 2011
7:55 am

The legal profession offers fewer career-track positions to recent graduates, as 'contract lawyering' replaces the stock of junior associates. As it constricts for the freshly minted lawyers, it expands for the erstwhile judges for whom 'public service' is an oxymoron.

Admission to practice law is not a right, but a license and privilege earned to serve as an officer of the court in the betterment...oh, who are we kidding. The judges run the admission process, and they demonstrate that the money in lawyering is more important than public service. As long as the voters permit lawyers to treat their licenses as tickets to an exclusive club for venality, the voters deserve the abuse heaped upon them by the legal profession.

One solution is to require all lawyers to serve in the courts at Peace Corps wages for a year on the tenth anniversary of admission, then as judges (at Peace Corps wages) for 3 years starting on the 20th anniversary, excepting only those who donate to the courts one half their income for the 5 year term preceding the court-service they are required to perform.

Why must the courts be available only to the wealthy, which is what wealthy judges make it appear to be?

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7. HIGHLIGHT (What's this?)

I get that it is a problem to keep judges when they can earn so much more money at a nice law firm, but right now feeling sorry for someone who has to sell their summer home in the Hamptons is not possible for me or for most people. If you can't live in New York on \$144,000 imagine being a teacher trying to live there. If they can't pay for tuition for their kids to go to private school, then I guess they'll have to go to public schools like the rest of us. If you can't pay for your two bedroom apartment fees, then I suggest moving to a different neighborhood. I understand that judges need a pay raise, but a little perspective is in order here.

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8. Dan
Kentucky
July 5th, 2011

Let's be clear. Most attorneys appearing before judges make nothing close to 10x's judge's pay. Only a tiny, tiny fraction do.

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 78 Readers

8:03 am

9. Jim
Ohio
July 5th, 2011
8:05 am

In Ohio, state court judges tend to be average to below-average attorneys with some political skills. Most of them would never be hired by top firms, and would certainly never become partners at those firms. Therefore, there is no basis for assuming that the typical judge should earn the same pay as the best-paid attorneys in the state. And, outside of large urban areas, many attorneys run for judge because judges do earn more than the typical small-town attorney and receive extraordinary pension benefits. I imagine that the situation is similar in New York, but would not know from this article. No doubt, if judges working in Manhattan are paid the same as their rural counterparts, they are underpaid. But to posit, without any critical analysis, that all judges should be paid the same as partners at top firms is sensationalism. As is so often the case, the Times should be embarrassed by the complete lack of critical thinking on the part of the reporter who prepared this article and the editors who allowed it to be published.

Recommend Recommended by 64 Readers

10. John from Westport
Connecticut
July 5th, 2011
8:06 am

If you want judges to remain impartial, they need to be in a position where financial pressures do not cause the need for potentially questionable side work. \$144K is not a lot of money for the head of a family in an expensive metropolitan area like NY. Have you seen college costs lately? 12 years without a raise? I guarantee there are plenty of mid-level bureaucrats making way more than \$144K without advanced degrees. Give them a raise, or they will walk. Then what?

Recommend Recommended by 50 Readers

11. peterg11742
NY
July 5th, 2011
8:06 am

I bet state politicians all received raises over the last 12 years.

Recommend Recommended by 45 Readers

12. CWH
Huntington, NY
July 5th, 2011
8:09 am

Is it not amazing that these people are complaining about a good and decent salary, but I guess it does not compare to the 244,000, 100 day work year of our lovely legislators who then pocket even more money by so called "speeches" (that's why weiner didn't want to leave)! But at the same time these judges drag out cases to make it look like they are actually doing something, acting like they are the best thing that ever happened to this world....meanwhile they are taking "campaign contributions" **THROW THE BUMS OUT!**

Recommend Recommended by 10 Readers

13. Lyn
Wisconsin
July 5th, 2011
8:15 am

I think most Americans, whose wages have essentially been stagnant for the last decade as well, have some sympathy about the plight of New York's judges. However, I would like to say that the \$1.4M incomes they can expect as partners in law firms are obscene. The legal profession has priced itself out of the reach of average Americans, which is one of the factors helping make our judicial system less rather than more fair and equitable. No wonder people believe that there are two law codes in this country: one for corporations and the wealthy who can afford good counsel and the other for the rest of us.

Recommend Recommended by 56 Readers

14. Chris Thompson
Northern California

Are you kidding me? Goodman calls not being paid enough to own a

July 5th, 2011
8:20 am

summer home in the Hamptons injustice? I thought judges were supposed to be thoughtful members of the world around them. Does she not see 10% unemployment and 25% underemployment? Let's have a little gratitude here. \$144,000 is way more money than most people in the U.S. make, and it's unarguably good for a public position. Really, she became a judge for the money? If I lived in New York, I would be glad to see her go. I want my judges to be motivated by public service, not excessive money-grubbing.

Good riddance.

Recommend Recommended by 62 Readers

15. Michael S
Wappingers Falls,
NY
July 5th, 2011
8:20 am

What NY doesn't need are judges who are political hacks who look upon the bench as a well paid reward for loyalty to the party and who can't earn as much in private practice. In many countries judges are appointed and are a separate profession with special training and licensing. In many places prosecutors are also chosen from among this separate profession.

Recommend Recommended by 15 Readers

16. SKV
NYC'er
July 5th, 2011
8:30 am

I think judge salaries should rise with inflation, but Emily Jane Goodman has harmed her chances and those of all judges by whining about the "injustice" of not being able to support a second home in the Hamptons.

Trappings of wealth are not entitlements.

Recommend Recommended by 47 Readers

17. HIGHLIGHT (What's this?)

Banty
Upstate New York
July 5th, 2011
8:35 am

\$144,000 in NYC is not 'rich', it's a rather ordinary professional salary.

I can't believe some of these comments. If we denigrate public employees to the extent that they return to the private sector, and prospective public employees opt out of the public sector, we will eventually be scraping the bottom of the barrel for talent. We'll be facing judges who couldn't make it in the public sector.

And it's happening already. I'm one of those prospective public employees. I'm a PhD level engineer in her '50s, who had long considered retiring at about this point, to be one of the secondary-level math and science teachers we need. But I'm hanging on my private sector job. Why? Well, actually it's not the salary, as I know it would step down. But it's the lack of respect I would face. Relatives who teach in Wisconsin, where I was considering relocating to be around them, are dealing with a sentiment that they have their paws in the taxpayer's pocket, that they languor around all summer, that "those who can't, teach". Well, Wisconsin has lost this H.S. science teacher; New York has also, because I might have stayed here.

I didn't go through ten years of arduous university training to be treated like a leech and an interloper. These judges didn't go through their university and law school training and experience for that, either. I don't know what people want anymore.

Recommend Recommended by 179 Readers

18. Miriam
Rochester, NY
July 5th, 2011
8:40 am

We all need to learn to live within our means, and be content with such things as we have through our chosen profession. Or move on.

Recommend Recommended by 14 Readers

19. Fred D. Horse
NJ
July 5th, 2011
8:40 am

Ah, yes, the reasonable voices of the mob, always jealous if someone got a law degree or a graduate degree that results in a higher salary. The propensity for class warfare arguments is being fed by our politicians and bought into by petty, jealous little people. Let's underpay our judges so we get not our brightest attorneys moving into that role but instead our dullards. That is the ticket - it makes for a great society and justice system.

Recommend Recommended by 56 Readers

20. am
nyc
July 5th, 2011
8:45 am

I must say, this is an unfortunate and I'm sure, not representative quote from Judge Goodman. For those who do not know of her, she is a of native Brooklyn who worked her way through school (Brooklyn College) and worked as a staff attorney at the Legal Aid Society after law school. She is a conscientious jurist who has made fair rulings, been unafraid to rule against City Hall, and at least in my mind, has been an advocate of justice for all and civil rights that has rendered quite a few important decisions in recent years that protect us all. She's a very good judge, and I must guess that the reference to the Hamptons was surely not the most meaningful thing she said to this reporter. They printed it to get a rise out of readers, mostly likely.

Recommend Recommended by 59 Readers

21. George S
New York, NY
July 5th, 2011
8:55 am

Some of the comments in here are very sad. If you really think that judges are all political hacks, losers who do little, "below average", etc. While some of this undeniably applies to some on the bench (and right off, no I'm not an attorney) this cynical view of people who are granted tremendous power over our lives is shallow and rather scary.

Salaries at some of the major law firms is obscene, no denying, and that is often based on getting rich by charging obscene rates which many greedy clients are glad to do if only they can join the jackpot justice system of lawsuits and class actions. (I would venture that most of those super high firms are not doing criminal work.) But \$144K for someone who has ideally practiced law for many years - you don't want a kid just out of law school being a judge - is far from outrageous. Many cops and firefighters earn more than that. These judges are given tremendous power over our lives and we should want to get and retain the best possible candidates, which includes paying them commensurate with the years of experience they acquire. They should not be motivated by money, but realistically, who among us does not factor that into our decisions of what path to pursue. Why should an attorney making even \$200K (not unreasonable in NYC for that profession, deserved or not) take a cut in pay to become a judge?

We should want to get and keep the very best on the bench, an argument that we seem to have no problem accepting when discussing teachers or doctors. Judges shouldn't get rich on the bench but they need a pay structure in line with their profession that allows highly qualified individuals to make the transition to those positions

Recommend Recommended by 56 Readers

22. Baptiste C.
Paris, France
July 5th, 2011
9:00 am

I think this article presents a somewhat biased point of view as it somehow implies (through the various testimonies and the facts it chose to cite) that Court Judges should have salaries on par with private sector lawyers.

In my opinion, like all public servant posts, salary shouldn't be among the

main motivations of the applicants and therefore, the fact that they could gain more elsewhere should be of no relevance. It stands to reason that if a person's goal is to make the most money, public sector jobs shouldn't even appear on their radar.

That being said, the salaries shouldn't be so low as to discourage a reasonably motivated person with the necessary qualification. They should be on par or slightly lower than what that person could make in an average job requiring similar qualifications. They should *not* be compared to what an overqualified person might possibly earn in certain privileged jobs.

In the end, what this article really puts in perspective are the outrageous salaries earned by a small minority of lawyers more than the low salaries earned by the judges. As others said, 144k\$ yearly seems to be quite a lot of money already.

@Noo Yawka

I'm sure there would be no short supply of competent candidates at the current yearly salaries and maybe these would actually be motivated by their duty as judge and not by what the post may bring them career or salary wise.

Recommend Recommended by 7 Readers

23. HIGHLIGHT (What's this?)

I grew up in NYC and at the time my dad was a "hearing examiner" later called an "administrative law judge." He had to take an exam to become what he was for 35 years before he retired and subsequently died. He was probably the most decent, honest, tough, impatient man I'd ever known before getting into the work world. I remember as a child asking him to help me fill out a form for a Regents Scholarship when in high school. His comment, "You don't qualify. We earn too much money for that." So my reply was, "So leave those boxes blank." At that, he blew up at me and followed me around the house for 2 hours lecturing and yelling at me about honesty, cheating, lying and getting caught. I never forgot that Sunday afternoon as a 16 year old. And when faced with questionable circumstances at work and at life, I've towed the line and stayed in the "honest, and decent" category of values and ethics.

My dad used to come home and talk with my mom about lawyers who presented to him and peers who were not on the right side of ethics. He had an insight and compassion for people. He was one of the people responsible for flushing out the problems with LILCO and facilitating their shutdown after their fleecing of the public and mishandling of their responsibilities.

I am very proud of my father. He was very humble and thrifty. He felt that too many people were in their positions for the money and when you work for the money as a goal rather than as compensation for a job well done, you can easily go to the dark side and be bought. If your price is Truth and Justice, then the money presented as a lure is never enough. My father avoided the "rich" lawyers and tended to associate with people who had values like him.

As an officer in WWII who worked his way up and was a commander under McArthur in the Pacific, he knew the value of respect and leadership. He knew he had to take care of his men first, before himself.

Unfortunately, they don't make judges or men like him anymore.

Recommend Recommended by 69 Readers

24. TS

ann arbor
July 5th, 2011
9:10 am

A lot the comments here are simply resentful. They complain about the amount that judges to make compared to what they are making. They complain about the professional ethics of judges who are concerned that they don't make enough money.

But, bottom line, judges are leaving, we don't care, and here is another example of our governmental infrastructure collapsing because we have given up on government. American people are actively attacking the American government, and its collapse is the result. America ain't what it used to be, and soon it will be like nothing you've ever seen.

Recommend Recommended by 44 Readers

25. John
NJ
July 5th, 2011
9:15 am

#21 - about the pay cut, or at least reduced pay compared to private practice:

"There is perhaps no more fitting finale to a long legal career than a judgeship. Ascending the bench after years appearing before it can bring power, respect, personal satisfaction, reasonable hours and, often, free parking."

Emphasis on 'reasonable hours'. Lawyers (maybe not at the partner level, but the lower ranks at least) are reasonably well known for working long hours and pretty much devoting their lives to their work. This is the case for other professionals as well, though the extents might vary from profession to profession.

Paying someone less than they could be making elsewhere for working less than they would elsewhere is neither an insult to them nor underpaying them. Many successful people actually would prefer having a life outside of work and would be content working just enough to live well and enjoy the rest of their time.

Recommend Recommended by 11 Readers

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