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Pay Frozen, More New York Judges Leave Bench

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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

ALL COMMENTS HIGHLIGHTS READERS' RECOMMENDATIONS

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51. Annabelle S. Washington
July 5th, 2011
9:49 am

My heart bleeds for them.

Recommend Recommended by 4 Readers

52. comink8 connecticut
July 5th, 2011
9:49 am

Judges began to lose public support when they became activists. If they want support, they should stick to the law and get out of politics. It is their choice. There is also an inability of judges to guide their own so the outlier judges who make a mockery of the law are to, stated and they also erode public support for the judiciary. If people do not admire their behavior or the basis of their rulings, they lose their special position in the eyes of the public. They appear to have made their choice are reaping the rewards of their choices.

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53. Ruth NY
July 5th, 2011
9:49 am

Perhaps the problem is not that judges' salaries are too little but that partners in leading law firms are paid too much.

Recommend Recommended by 13 Readers

54. Jill Atlanta
July 5th, 2011
9:49 am

There are plenty of young lawyers who would be thrilled to earn \$144k annually while enjoying the respect and autonomy of a judgeship. In fact, call me, I know two bright, uncorrupted young men who remain unsullied by "connections" that might bias their findings and opinions.

Recommend Recommended by 5 Readers

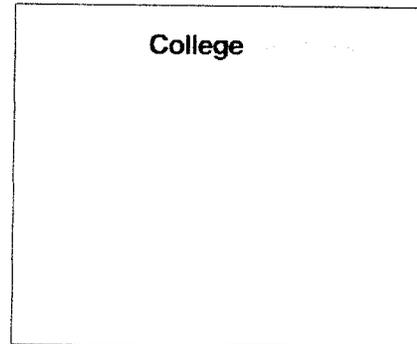
55. Tony Richmond, VA
July 5th, 2011
9:49 am

Time to return to the old "circuit court" system, & "court days"?

Recommend Recommended by 3 Readers

56. bmoconnor Portland, OR
July 5th, 2011
9:50 am

While there are no doubt problems with a 12 year pay freeze--in any profession--I think the journalist has made a couple judges look foolish and



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incredibly insensitive rather than capture the heart of the issue.

Further, to compare salaries of state officials and trial lawyers is to sensationalize the issue. The government judicial system is a not-for-profit organization, whereas a law firm is a business; it's an apples-to-oranges comparison.

Of course a second house in the Hamptons is a luxury. Of course \$144k per year is FAR from 'poverty' and more than most people in this county make (including myself and many other professionals). I don't think these are the things most judges take issue with. While the rest of the country receives COLAs and merit based raises, they've seen nothing, effectively devaluing their role in society. If we put ourselves in their shoes, I think we see what a toll this takes on morale and motivation to do the job. How many jobs have you stuck around where you didn't receive a raise for even a couple years?

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57. Rudolph
New York, NY
July 5th, 2011
9:50 am

If a government official has done government work throughout his/her entire career it means that this is all they can do. To, at age 50 or older, suddenly quit and join a private company is suicide. I have seen such characters and they last about one year in their new company (3 month honeymoon, 6 month for management to realize that a mistake was made and 3 more months getting rid of them in a diplomatic way. After that they become freelance consultants with an average annual income of about \$100,000 and no more benefits, paid vacations, and retirement benefits. It is comparable to a 50 year old guy going through a second awakening and divorcing his wife - big mistake.

Recommend Recommended by 2 Readers

58. forbesgayton
Albuquerque, New Mexico
July 5th, 2011
9:50 am

I agree with John (NJ) on this and Diverx99: On one hand, it's hard to sympathize with anyone making \$144K as being 'poor' or starving. Judges must also mind their position to objectively dispense justice. However, Joe Gould's point on "contract lawyering" is also well-taken: at some point, one does expect to be paid commensurate with one's education, experience and tenure. One does not attend all the prerequisite education to make no more than someone coming out of college by the Judgeship level, and 'by the way' also have to constantly make due with state cuts in resources, i.e., staff and equipment, yet still be expected to perform one's duties to perfection as if these growingly severe cuts do not exist... and with a stagnant salary AND still be happy/grateful with the career. At some point, a breaking point IS reached and one has to wonder/consider if one's talents/skills are really valued. It's not just about the money, folks. We ask a lot when we ask ANYONE to do a hell of a lot more with a hell of a lot less, and to be still happy given one's education, experience and tenure.

Recommend Recommended by 5 Readers

59. Bob
New York
July 5th, 2011
9:50 am

What ever happened to the nobility of public service? Should we pay our judges millions a year because law partners make that? If they want a cost of living increase, can we agree to have a cost of living decrease in the bad years? Or, should we continue to pay them bloated salaries?

Twelve years without a pay raise after being the highest paid courts in the land for a decade seems fine to me.

Our police, firefighters, teachers, and municipal workers are all being laid off or having their pay reduced and politicians are attacking them as part of a bloated system that is crippling our economy? Why are the judges free

from this charge?

The problems of the court can be summed up in one word: Greed.

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 6 Readers

60. HIGHLIGHT (What's this?)

Edie
NY
July 5th, 2011
9:50 am

I live and work in metro NY too. I have a fancy master's degree and 25 years of professional experience. I am employed full-time by a prestigious institution at a job requiring an advanced degree and substantial experience. They pay me \$46,820.

The problem isn't that judicial salaries are too low, it's that they are too far from attorney salaries. Gross inequality breeds resentment.

Do those hard-charging attorneys really add that much more value to society? Different levels of education and effort should indeed be rewarded differently, but the judge and attorney are presumably on par educationally. As to the effort...there are only 24 hours in a day.

So I sympathize with the judges, because in this they are feeling the erosion caused by our nation's obsession with individualism and the 30-year "conservative" war on public life...

...and I don't, because struggling to afford a summer home isn't the same as struggling to afford utilities or healthcare. Plus, the judges aren't fighting the larger injustice. They're just trying to make sure they get their slice.

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61. Andrey Z
New York, NY
July 5th, 2011
9:50 am

What did you expect. Most judges in NYS make about 2x of what an MTA worker makes and receive marginally better benefits. Meanwhile, their peers in private firms bring home tonnes more. We have an inefficient labor structure in our public sector, and as a result all talent gets sucked out into the private sector.

Why should someone who sacrificed years of his/her life, taking out loans, excelling in undergrad, and succeeding in the most competitive market for attorneys in the country, settle for anything less? Would you?

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 10 Readers

62. Capt Concernicus
Midwest
July 5th, 2011
9:50 am

This is why if I ever have to go to court, I'm taking my case to Judge Judy.

[Recommend](#) Recommended by 3 Readers

63. Edward
New York
July 5th, 2011
9:50 am

On the bright side, the judges are eligible under the Rent Control/Stabilization law to occupy apartments at below market rents. I am glad that the Governor of Manhattan, Andrew Cuomo raised the income level to \$200,000 to ehm, ehm, "protect" these unfortunate people that can barely scrape by on \$144k a year.

Waaaaaaaa

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64. Emily Barlow
NYC
July 5th, 2011
9:50 am

Judges are hated by most in new York because they feed the feeding frenzy that lawyers have when new yorkers get divorced. Often divorcing couples end up hating the apathetic judges more than their own lawyers because

new York judges simply don't care about the cases that come before them and decide cases based on personal whims or ideologies, don't even bother reading pleadings most of the time. They also "help" the lawyers (their buddies) to destroy divorcing litigants finances, force the sale of homes to pay legal fees, the list goes on. These judges have no moral scruples, they disgust me. In short, new York judges suck.

Recommend Recommended by 3 Readers

65. Anre
DC
July 5th, 2011
9:50 am

This article is bad journalism. You can't use average salary for judges and compare it to the average salary of partners at top law firms. I'm willing to bet the average salary of judges in NY is not too different from the average salary of all attorneys in NY.

Recommend Recommended by 12 Readers

66. American Who
Served
Maryland
July 5th, 2011
9:50 am

Too bad millions of other Amerians do not have the options available to judges. Once again, middle class and poor get the shaft.

Recommend Recommended by 4 Readers

67. jicrocket
New Britain, Conn.
July 5th, 2011
9:54 am

The left represented by the NYTimes is always bashing CEO's and Corporate greed, but they never mention greedy over paid rich lawyers who are mostly beholden to the left - now we can add judges too!

The judicial system is as broke as any system in our government. It is time to restrict lawyer suits and payoffs to public servants. The cover boy for this scam can be John Edwards(D).

Tort reform is completely ignored by the left and their media paramours.

Recommend Recommended by 5 Readers

68. DJS
New York
July 5th, 2011
9:54 am

\$144,000 sounds like a fairly low salary given the important work that judges do.

If judges are leaving the bench in droves in New York, which they seem to be, we will eventually end up with a system in which the judges are primarily attorneys who could not get top jobs in law firms.

Would any one of the readers who posits that \$144,000 is a high salary for a Judge in New York, want to put his or her life in the hands of a judge who is their judge because he or she couldn't get a decent job offer from a law firm ?!

I sure wouldn't. The Cost of Living in New York is extremely high, and \$144,000 would barely cover a modest lifestyle for a family in New York.

Recommend Recommended by 18 Readers

69. Mark Flynn
Santa Rosa Beach,
FL
July 5th, 2011
9:54 am

1 of 10 are leaving the bench. That seems like reasonable turnover. Prevents staleness.

Comment #21 states many firefighters and policeman earn \$144K. Maybe the police and fire chiefs of NYC should make that much, but no one else. Please don't ask the taxpayers of the other 49 and a half states to bail NYC out if it more than these two get \$144K.

Recommend Recommended by 3 Readers

70. S Santhanam

It is interesting to read the emotional outbursts of a number of readers,

Pune, India
July 5th, 2011
10:00 am

sometimes cynical as part of their comments. There are balanced views too. As an Indian, when I read them, I feel whether there is any truth in such negative portrayal of judges as having political patronage, looking for more money etc. If so, it is sad and the beginning of the end of the most revered system, that is judiciary, in one of the best democracies in the world, that is USA. Whenever I read the judgements pronounced by some of the courts in USA, I always feel that Indian judiciary should draw some lessons as many in India think that Indian judiciary is very corrupt (a number of Divakarans - a judge of a High Court in India). To put it lightly, if vacancies for the post of judges in NYC are announced and one may not be surprised if an Indian judge/ lawyer tries using all means to get there.

Recommend Recommended by 0 Readers

71. Zerntar
New Jersey
July 5th, 2011
10:05 am

I merely want the commentators who are not from NYC to understand that \$144k a year is not very much money in this part of the world. For example, you should expect to spend at least \$400,000 for a "starter" home in Northern NJ and significantly more in the City. The point being that \$144k a year is barely enough for a judge who lives in NYC to support a family on, not to mention send kids to college, etc. Forcing judges to scrape by is bad public policy as it invites abuse and degrades the position.

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72. George L
NYC
July 5th, 2011
10:15 am

The salary of judges in NYS is far higher than the salary of most practicing lawyers. By virtue of their position - and not their skills - judges can earn more in private practice because powerhouse lawfirms believe it can give them an edge in court. Had they not been judges in the first place, these higher paying opportunities would not be available. So rather than being underpaid in their public position, they will be overpaid in a private position. Why should that generate sympathy for judges? If some cops can earn more as private detectives, does that mean cops are underpaid? I cry no tears for judges. The position is voluntary.

Recommend Recommended by 5 Readers

73. noroids
New York, NY
July 5th, 2011
10:15 am

I really wish I could feel bad about hearing this news but after watching the pay structure in my own field of expertise be dismantled and outsourced after years of serving it loyally I just can't. Since where does it say that judges should command a 6 figure salaries, and perks beyond that? People who serve the bench were portrayed as those who were passionate about doing the right thing and keeping crime off our streets. Now they are just like the rest of us. No raise? Seek employment elsewhere. That's what I was told after almost 20 years of dedicated service. Sorry if I sound bitter but it's hard to say "What a shame, she had to sell her Hampton Beach house" and feel any type of remorse.

Recommend Recommended by 8 Readers

74. Rick A
New Smyrna
Beach, FL
July 5th, 2011
10:19 am

The problem is not that judges are underpaid, but rather, lawyers are overpaid.

This is another part of the continued degradation of American society by the rich and powerful.

Just think, if rich people paid the same tax rates the rest of us did, we could afford to pay judges more. Same thing if corps paid taxes instead of lobbyists to reduce their taxes. Might bring down the cost of lawyers. If supply and demand actually worked...

Recommend Recommended by 12 Readers

75. Patrick
Long Island NY
July 5th, 2011
10:19 am

I would love to see State Supreme Court Justice Lippman resign for unilaterally vacating the death penalty against the desire of the voters of New York State. Judge Lippman, instead of guilty murderers being killed to prevent future killings, now the victims of killers are dying. Please resign, thank you.

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