

Lawmakers say pay raise is small, reasonable

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LANSING

Risking significant political damage in the process, three area state representatives voted for a 6 percent pay raise last week, but said the raise is justified because it's really small.

"There's never a good time for a pay increase when you're a public official, but we ought to get them now and then," said Rep. Maxine Berman, D-Southfield, who helped block the move by Rep. Greg Kaza, R-Rochester Hills, to refuse the raise, which was proposed by the State Officers Compensation Commission.

SOC's job is to suggest a pay increase for elected state officials every two years. In 1991 the Legislature refused to accept a 13-percent raise suggested by SOCC.

Kaza and others opposed the raise this year because the state budget is tight and it would look bad for representatives to take a

raise while cutting the budget in other areas.

The new annual salaries, which go into effect Jan. 1, 1994, are: \$112,000 for governor, \$84,000 for lieutenant governor, \$112,000 for supreme court judges and \$48,000 for legislators.

The vote to overturn SOCC's suggested raise would have passed on a two-thirds majority, but missed that mark by five votes.

Below inflation

The new raise will go into effect four years after the last raise, which works out to a 1.25-percent increase per year, not enough to keep up with inflation. So in real spending power the representatives will make less in 1994 than they did in 1990.

"Five percent over four years is

not out of line," said Rep. Jan Dolan, R-Farmington Hills, who voted two years ago to turn down a 13-percent raise, but voted last week to retain the latest raise.

Rep. William Keith, D-Garden City, voted for the raise, arguing that "for the effort required to be a good state legislator, that's a reasonable salary."

Opponents of the raise, however, see the issue differently.

Because the state's budget is so tight, with little wiggle room for discretionary spending and more cuts and freezes ahead, they feel that taking a raise, any raise, sends the wrong message to voters.

Rep. Deborah Whyman, R-Canton, is a good example. "We're going to be asking other people to hold the line and take cuts," she said. "Until (the budget is balanced) I don't think we can take luxuries with our pay."

Pay raise opponents don't quib-

ble with the argument that 5-percent over four years is reasonable, but rather they object to the symbolism.

Didn't earn it

"(The raise) may well be deserved," said Barbara Dobb, R-West Bloomfield. "It may be in line. The numbers may be reasonable. But I don't think collectively we earned the raise."

Unlike some other state offi-

cials, though, who have said they'll give their raise to charity, Dobb will use hers to pay the bills. "Maybe I'll use it to pay for my property tax increase," the Lakeland homeowner said.

Rep. Richard Young, D-Deerborn Heights, also voted against the raise. "I felt that the general public was overwhelmingly opposed to it," he said, noting that the fiscal 1993 budget has to have

another \$400 million carved out of it.

Young said that his constituents are saying, "We want you to pull your belt tight the way we're pulling ours."

Rep. John Jamian, R-Bloomfield Hills, opposed the pay raise, too. "I think we're sending the wrong message out when we vote for a pay raise," he said. "That to me is almost contemptuous."

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