

Beacon Hill Roll Call

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Prominent Dems may look to change vacancy law ... again

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PAY RAISES FOR MORE THAN 400 STATEHOUSE STAFF: House Speaker Robert DeLeo and Senate President Therese Murray both handed out pay raises to 460-plus Statehouse employees.

DeLeo gave 460 legislative aides and other House staffers an increase totaling \$764,000 while Murray gave only some of her own aides and staffers a 3 percent raise.

According to DeLeo spokesman Seth Gitell, House staffers, the majority of whom earn between \$34,000 and \$42,000 annually, have not received a pay adjustment in more than four years. He notes the increases are only 2.16 percent of the overall House budget, and no additional money will be needed to fund them. Gitell said, "This cost-of-living adjustment is possible because the House has cut its payroll almost 10 percent since 2009 and the number of full-time employees has decreased from 546 to 460."

Speaker DeLeo added, "A lot of these folks are having difficulty that I hear from them and the reps paying their own bills now. So I consider it something we needed to do so they could continue to exist themselves."

Barbara Anderson, executive director of Citizens for Limited Taxation commented, "I'm sure some staffers deserve a raise, but did anyone notice that the state budget is in deficit and the federal crisis is going to make things worse?"

The exact numbers for Murray's hikes were not readily available. Murray spokesman David Falcone said, "The Senate President gave some of her staffers a 3 percent raise after performance evaluations. These staffers work very hard and many of them have gone several years without a pay increase."

The hikes come at a time when state revenues are not meeting expectations and there are whispers of possible mid-year budget cuts and tax hikes. Revelation of the hikes also coincided with the protests of a group of human service workers who were outside Patrick's office demanding the release \$20 million in pay raises for some 29,000 human service workers. According to the Massachusetts Council of Human Service Providers, these workers make an average of \$12 an hour and haven't received a pay raise in five years. The Council says the funds would increase salaries by about 2 percent -- an approximate increase for workers of about \$13 per week or 33 cents per hour. "These low-paid workers serving people with disabilities, our elderly residents, veterans and homeless individuals feel the Patrick-Murray administration's action to indefinitely delay

this promised 2 percent increase is heartless and lacks an appreciation for this workforce's daily sacrifices on behalf of all of us," said Council President Michael Weekes.

The Patrick Administration refutes the charge that the governor has frozen the account. "We haven't frozen any salary reserve," Patrick said. "We have all kinds of steps we've taken in anticipation of potential budget cuts because revenue has slowed down but we haven't made any final decisions. I understand the sensitivity about those issues and the sensitivity of some of the folks who are here."

The governor does not have any control over the pay hikes given by DeLeo and Murray.