



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on January 10, 2011

Massachusetts State Legislature Takes Pay Cut

Thirteen years ago Massachusetts enacted a constitutional provision which required an adjustment in the pay of state legislators and other elected state officials based upon the rise, or fall, of the median household income in the Commonwealth. That income declined by .5% over the period of time used in the estimate. What is the result? Ordinary members of the Massachusetts Legislature have had their yearly salary of \$61,440 reduced by a whopping \$307.



It is not, however, all sacrifice for legislators in the Bay State. Members' office accounts are paid for by the taxpayers. When they travel to Boston and back, they receive travel reimbursement and per diem for meals. If they live far enough from Boston, they can even receive a reduction in their federal taxes for travel to work and back. Campaign laws allow them to use their campaign funds for travel, dining out and other purposes provided there is some connection to their political campaign. Chairmen of legislative committees receive a bonus of \$7,500.

The other elected state officials Governor Deval Patrick, Lieutenant Governor Timothy Murray, Attorney General Martha Coakley, Secretary of State William Galvin, Treasurer-elect Steve Grossman, and Auditor-elect Suzanne Bump are presumed covered by the constitutional change. Secretary of State Galvin, though, has argued that a 2007 statute which authorized a one-time change in the pay of constitutional officers is the controlling law.

Though the effect of the constitutional provision upon the huge budget of Massachusetts is trivial, the notion that politicians will have a performance-based salary is a first step toward placing economic growth ahead of state planning. A much more interesting experiment would be to tie the compensation of state employees to the median income of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. When the business climate is bad, when regulations are too onerous, and the tax burden is too crushing, then those who administer the states agencies would face the same compensation problems as any Bay Stater in the private sector. In particular, any such performance-based compensation should provide that any employee of a public employee union will be governed by this plan.

That sort of Massachusetts Plan might be worthy of export. If the compensation of elected officials, as well as that of public employees particularly those who work for public employee labor unions were tied to the median family income within the jurisdiction, then there would be a vested interest that does not



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currently exist for prudent, business-friendly, low tax climates in the state.

Reducing the salary of Massachusetts state legislators by \$307 a year, however, it not going to turn around the *Titanic* that is bankrupt, bloated state government in America.

Photo: Massachusetts State House



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