

House Republican Press Release

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Should the State Legislature be Full-Time?



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While serving as Speaker of the State House of Representatives, James Amann (D-Milford) has also been a fundraiser for the Connecticut Chapter of the Multiple Sclerosis Society. Lobbyists at the capitol have donated to the M.S. charity. Now, the State Ethics Commission has ruled that this constitutes a conflict of interest. Speaker Amann agreed before the ruling was issued to refrain from soliciting donations for the charity from lobbyists any longer.

The issue of this conflict of interest has given rise to another issue this session: would having a full-time legislature remove the potential of this kind of conflict of interest? While Speaker Amann does not advocate making such a change, there are other members who do.

Members of the Connecticut General Assembly currently earn between \$32,500 and \$44,189 annually, depending on chairmanships or other leadership roles which they might hold. Sessions are held during odd years from January to June, and in even years from February to May. Serving in the legislature has been considered a part-time post since its creation in colonial times, with most members that currently serve simultaneously holding other full-time or part-time jobs.

Advocates of a full-time legislature assert that if the job of legislator were full-time, the possibility of a conflict would be greatly diminished if not eliminated, since their legislative post would be their primary source of income.

Up until now, the concept of a citizen legislature has depended on the notion that members of varying walks of life, professions, and life experiences would convene during these constitutionally proscribed times to enact laws. Their collective and diverse experiences are meant to be among the legislature's strongest assets.

Currently, about a dozen states have full-time legislatures. Of these, none has an outright ban on outside employment, and enacting such a ban would be far too limiting.

However, if creating less incentive for legislators to have another job is the goal, how much will legislators need to be paid to achieve that result? The cost could be significant. Interestingly, while there is talk of higher salaries for legislators, I have heard no talk of longer hours. What we may get instead of a full-time legislature is a highly paid part-time legislature.

The issue is an interesting one to consider, and such a change would greatly alter Connecticut's political landscape.

Right now Connecticut has some of the most strict campaign finance and ethics laws in the nation, something we can be proud of. That may be enough to get through the problem.

A seat in the legislature is not simply a way to earn a paycheck, or to claim a health benefit upon retirement.

Themis Klarides is Deputy Republican Leader in the State House of Representatives. She is serving her fifth term in the General Assembly representing the 114th Assembly District - the towns of Woodbridge, Orange and Derby.