

Lawmakers save cash, workers get docked

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ALBANY — Four Staten Island lawmakers received special treatment that saved them more than \$1,000 while state workers endured a cut in salary.

The Island legislators — except Assemblywoman Elizabeth Connelly, D-West Brighton — declined to partake in a salary lag that the Legislature imposed on the entire state workforce, including its own staff.

The lag payroll program, which just ended, took five days' pay out of the salaries of each state worker. The employees are supposed to be reimbursed when they leave government.

Seventy out of 211 legislators — or one-third of the Legislature — legally opted out of sharing in the sacrifice to help deal with the state's fiscal crisis. The list of lawmakers who preserved their own salaries included Island Sens. John J. Marchi and Martin Connor and Assembly members Robert Stranieri and Eric Vitaliano.

Marchi, R-Ward Hill, and Vitaliano, D-Dongan Hills, voted to lag state workers' salaries while shielding their own.

Connor, a Democrat whose triborough district includes the Island's North Shore, and

Stranieri, R-Dongan Hills, voted against the program.

All four previously defended their actions. The two legislative leaders, Democratic Assembly Speaker Mel Miller and Senate Republican Majority Leader Ralph Marino, also protected their salaries and stipends while forcing state workers to give up part of theirs.

"It is an outrage that all state legislators did not make the same sacrifices that they imposed on state employees," said Herb London, former Conservative Party candidate for governor and co-founder of CHANGE-NY, a new government watchdog group.

"Even when public pressure forced some state legislators to join the lag-payroll program," he said, "they incredibly exempted their taxpayer-financed bonuses from the deductions."

Under the lag-payroll program adopted in December of last year, state employees had five days pay deducted from their paychecks between January and March of this year. For state workers, the deductions were mandatory and based on their total salary.

For state legislators, however, the lag-payroll deductions were voluntary and applied only to their \$57,500 part-time legislative salaries. Lawmakers can receive an additional

\$6,500 to \$30,000 in taxpayer-financed bonuses for additional assignments.

Marchi saved \$1,577 by refusing to participate in the lag-payroll program. As vice president of the Senate, he receives a \$24,500 stipend on top of his \$57,500 legislative salary.

Connor, until recently the Senate assistant Democratic minority leader, saved \$1,231 over the 10-week period. He received a \$13,000 stipend on top of his legislative salary before being ousted from his leadership position by Senate Minority Leader Manfred Ohrenstein.

Vitaliano saved \$1,279. He also gets a \$9,000 stipend as co-chairman of the Legislative Administrative Regulations Review Commission.

Stranieri saved \$1,231 over the same period. He receives a \$7,000 stipend for serving as the ranking Republican on the Assembly Committee on Corporations, Authorities and Commissions.

Mrs. Connelly, chairwoman of the Assembly Mental Health Committee, saved \$173. A portion of her base legislative salary was lagged, but her \$9,000 stipend as mental health chairwoman was exempted.

The two legislative leaders, Marino and Miller, saved \$1,683. They receive an additional \$30,000 leadership stipends.