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## CHRISTIE'S 'RETIRED' BUDGET GURU POCKETS \$1M IN PUBLIC PAYOUTS — by Mark Lagerkvist

Posted On November 14, 2011



One of New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie's key advisers has received three golden parachutes from taxpayers during the past nine years.

Cabinet Secretary Louis C. Goetting IV raked in \$1.1 million from two severance payouts and an early retirement deal. In addition, Goetting collects \$219,000 a year from the state – a [\\$130,000 salary](#) plus [\\$89,000 in pension](#) payments.

Christie hired Goetting (*pronounced "getting"*) in 2010 as a budget guru to help trim the cost of government. But Goetting resembles a problem, not a solution, according to a New Jersey Watchdog analysis of his employment history.

Prior to joining Christie's senior staff, Goetting resigned as executive vice president of Brookdale Community College in Monmouth County, effective June 2009. The parting included a payout of nearly \$190,000 plus perks. The [severance agreement](#) gave Goetting a six-month paid leave of absence at full salary (\$81,000), a one-year "transitional sabbatical" at half-salary (\$81,000) and \$27,500 in vacation pay.

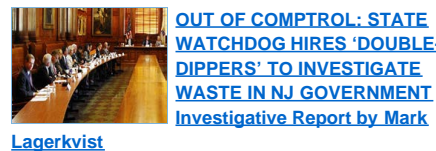
Before Brookdale, Goetting received \$180,525 in severance pay after he resigned in 2002 as a vice president at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ). [University officials confirmed the amount](#), but they [refused to release the severance agreement](#) to New Jersey Watchdog. Goetting's resignation took effect Jan. 1, 2003; UMDNJ would not release information about the reasons for his departure.

That same day – Jan. 1, 2003 – Goetting "retired" as a state employee at age 51, taking advantage of a state [Early Retirement Incentive Program](#). Prior to UMDNJ, Goetting had earned pension credits working for the state treasury and a number of municipalities, including South Brunswick, Bergenfield Borough and the City of Patterson.

Goetting's so-called retirement did not last long. He was [hired by Brookdale several months later](#) and returned to the public payroll in August 2003, receiving a [salary that reached \\$162,000 a year](#), not counting his state pension.

Four years later – in October 2007 - Goetting signed a severance agreement with Brookdale. As part of the package, he was allowed to keep his college email, cell phone and laptop computer until June 30, 2009, his official day of separation with Brookdale. The college also agreed to provide Goetting with a letter of reference – and promised not to say anything "disparaging" about him. ([Click here](#) to view the agreement.) In response to an Open Public Records Act request from New Jersey Watchdog, [Brookdale claims it has no documents](#) regarding the reason for Goetting's departure.

So far, Goetting has legally triple-dipped roughly \$1.1 million from public coffers. He has collected \$734,000 in early retirement checks from the state in addition to \$370,000 in payouts from Brookdale and UMDNJ. And that doesn't count his pay from the governor's office.



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For at least seven months, Christie has been aware that Goetting, now 60, receives \$89,000 a year in state pension checks on top of his \$130,000 salary. His administration defended the dual checks when the issue surfaced earlier this year.

"Lou Goetting is an invaluable member of the administration with an incredible level of expertise in state, county and local government budgeting and administration and public financing stretching back decades," Christie spokesman Michael Drewniak told [PolitickerNJ.com](#). "The governor called him out of retirement for that reason, and we are grateful to have him."

Whether the public will be grateful is another question. New Jersey Watchdog's investigation sheds new light on Goetting's post-retirement public employment and his six-figure severance payments from a county college and state university.

Christie has publicly opposed severance deals similar to the ones Goetting received from Brookdale and UMDNJ. Last year, the governor issued [Executive Order No. 15](#), which sought to halt the "wasteful and extravagant use of taxpayer funds" on "golden parachutes" paid to outgoing executives of state authorities.

Goetting's good fortune also illustrates weaknesses in Christie's pension reforms, which the governor has called his "biggest governmental victory." While the new laws require public workers to pay more for state pension benefits, it does little to stop those who game the system for millions by simultaneously collecting their public salaries plus retirement pay.

Lt. Gov. Kim Guadagno, Christie's second-in-command, has been implicated in an alleged scam that cost a state pension fund nearly a quarter-million dollars, as [first revealed by a New Jersey Watchdog investigative report last year](#).

In September 2008, Guadagno – then-sheriff of Monmouth County – hired Michael W. Donovan as her chief officer in charge of law enforcement, according to [her signed memo](#) and [her organization chart](#). Donovan had retired as an [investigator for the County Prosecutor's Office](#) in 2005.

Under pension rules, Donovan would lose his pension pay if the state found out he returned to work as the sheriff's chief officer. So Guadagno informed other county officials [Donovan was chief warrant officer](#) – a similar sounding, but different position.

The false statements enabled Donovan to collect \$218,000 in pension checks and avoid paying \$27,000 he should have contributed to the pension fund. In May, [state authorities announced a criminal investigation](#) of the Donovan affair.

Overall, double-dipping practices by public employees are legal and apparently widespread throughout the state.

An ongoing New Jersey Watchdog investigation has found 44 top county cops – 16 sheriffs and 28 undersheriffs from 20 counties – collect \$3.25 million a year in pensions in addition to their county salaries. On average, each rakes in \$182,000 a year – \$108,000 in salary plus \$74,000 in pension pay. (For details, click [here](#) and [here](#).)

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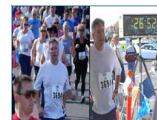
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