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SIXTY NJ STATE 'DOUBLE-DIPPERS' COLLECT \$10 MILLION PER YEAR; ONE-THIRD HIRED UNDER GOV. CHRISTIE'S 'REFORM' ADMINISTRATION Investigative Report by **Mark Lagerkvist**
 Posted On August 29, 2012



Gov. Chris Christie preached fiscal reform from the national pulpit of the GOP National Convention in Tampa, Fla.

What Christie failed to confess during his prime-time keynote speech are the sins of commission that continue New Jersey's costly tradition of double-dipping — allowing government employees to “retire,” start collecting a pension and then return to work for the state, often the next day or week.

While 9.8 percent of residents suffer from unemployment, a 35-year high, some well-connected state officials collect two paychecks instead of one. [New Jersey Watchdog found 60 double-dippers who collect a total of nearly \\$10 million a year](#) — \$4.4 million in pensions in addition to \$5.5 million in state salaries.

One-third of them were hired under the Christie administration with duties as government officials to protect taxpayers from fiscal foul play and abuses of the public trust. They include:

- Three investigators for the Office of State Comptroller — [John Silver](#), [Joseph Celli](#) and [Richard Nuel](#) — collectively receive \$262,415 a year in pensions plus [in \\$276,000 in salaries](#). OSC is charged with uncovering waste, abuse and fraud in government.
- Assistant Insurance Commissioner Joseph Brennan claims \$204,857 a year — [\\$123,000 in salary](#) and [\\$81,857 from pension](#). Brennan heads a unit that investigates insurance fraud.
- Medical Marijuana Director John O'Brien harvests \$167,889 a year — [\\$83,889 in pension](#) plus his [\\$84,000 salary](#) from the Department of Health.
- Thomas Flarity, director of security, investigations and audits for the Motor Vehicle Commission, counts on \$188,544 a year — [\\$105,000 in salary](#) and \$83,544 from pension.
- Christie's Deputy Chief of Staff Louis Goetting (*pronounced "getting"*) gets \$228,860 a year — [\\$140,000 in salary](#) plus [\\$88,860 from pension](#). Goetting is Christie's budget guru on cutting the cost of government.

Christie gave his deputy chief a \$10,000 annual raise this year, following New Jersey Watchdog's report that Goetting had received \$1.1 million in early retirement pay and severance packages from public coffers.

The [60 double-dippers](#) receive an average of [\\$165,000 a year](#) — \$73,517 from pension plus \$92,461 in salary. Fifty-seven are state law enforcement officials who retired under a special law that allows them to receive full pensions after 25 years regardless of age. Twenty-eight retired while still in their 40s.

"I don't have a problem with it at all," Democratic state Sen. Fred Madden told New Jersey Watchdog earlier this year. "You cannot be in your 60s and be a state trooper."

[Madden collects more than \\$241,255 a year](#) — [\\$85,272 from pension](#), \$49,000 as a legislator and [\\$106,983 in salary](#) as dean of a publicly-funded police academy. He retired from the State Police at age 48 one decade ago.

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To Madden, putting state retirees back on the payroll makes sense.

"There's a lot of positives to taking retirees that have strong resumes and a productive work experience and placing them in other public jobs," said Madden. "You can cherry-pick the very best retirees available and put together a great team."

In 24 cases, the "retired" employees started work at their new state jobs just one day after retirement from their previous positions. Sometimes, the only real change was two state checks instead of one.

Consider the case of [Thomas Gilbert](#). He held the post of commander of the Atlantic City Tourism District when he retired from the State Police on Aug. 31, 2011.

The next day, Gilbert started his new position with the Division of Criminal Justice. His job: Commander of the Atlantic City Tourism District. In reality, Gilbert never changed duties or employers. Criminal Justice and State Police are divisions of the New Jersey Department of Law and Public Safety.

What did change was Gilbert's income. His [\\$80,620 salary](#) and [\\$93,372 pension](#) add up to \$173,992 a year.

The longstanding practice of gaming the state pension system has continued under Christie. Nineteen of the retiree-employees on New Jersey Watchdog's list became double-dippers under his administration.

It should be noted Allen DelVento and Edward Fanelle were respectively nominated as members of the State Parole Board and Casino Control Commission by lame-duck Gov. Jon Corzine. After Christie took office, he did not withdraw their nominations or oppose their confirmations.

Fanelle draws \$207,440 a year — [\\$125,000 in salary](#) supplemented by an [\\$82,440 pension](#). DelVento gets \$206,305 per annum — [\\$89,855 in retirement pay](#) plus his [\\$116,305 salary](#).

Double-dipping also thrives in New Jersey's local governments. Previous New Jersey Watchdog investigations have revealed double-dipping by [44 county sheriffs and undersheriffs](#) plus [125 officers employed by prosecutors throughout the state](#).

While most double-dipping is legal under state law, [Christie's running mate – Lt. Gov. Kim Guadagno](#) – has been [implicated in a state criminal investigation](#) of possible pension fraud.

As a county sheriff in 2008, Guadagno made false statements to enable her chief officer to pocket nearly \$85,000 a year in retirement pay while drawing an \$87,500 annual salary. The double-dipping scheme first was [reported by New Jersey Watchdog](#) in 2010.

The investigation, requested by a state pension board, has been assigned to Criminal Justice, a unit where Guadagno once served as deputy director. Despite the apparent conflict, Christie has not appointed a special prosecutor.

A spokesman for Christie and Guadagno have declined to comment. The Attorney General's Office has not responded to questions.

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[CLICK HERE](#) for New Jersey Watchdog's list of 60 state double-dippers.

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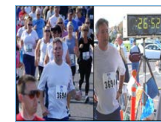
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