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HOW 18 DOUBLE-DIPPING NJ LAWMAKERS BLOCK PENSION REFORM Investigative Report by Mark Lagerkvist

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Double-dipping by New Jersey public officials continues to thrive for one big reason: Too many legislators either directly profit or quietly condone a costly practice that drains untold millions from state pension funds.

New Jersey Watchdog found 18 state lawmakers who receive retirement checks totaling \$782,000 a year in addition to their legislative salaries. The roster includes leaders of each party in both the Senate and Assembly. (See full list below)

The Assembly's roll of double-dippers features Deputy Speaker Connie Wagner, D-Paramus; Deputy Majority Leader Joseph Egan, D-New Brunswick; Majority Conference Leader Gordon Johnson, Teaneck; Minority Conference Leader [David Rible](#), R-Wall Township; and Appropriations Officer John DiMaio, R-Bridgewater.

Ranking twin-scoopers in the Senate include Majority Leader Loretta Weinberg, D-Teaneck and Minority Conference Leader Robert Singer R-Lakewood.

The biggest dipper in the Legislature is [Sen. Fred Madden](#), D-Turnersville, who collects nearly a quarter-million dollars a year from two public jobs and a state pension. In addition to \$49,000 in legislative pay, the Senate Labor Committee chairman receives \$85,272 from a State Police pension and \$111,578 as dean of Law & Justice at Gloucester County College.

"Obviously, I don't have a problem with people doing it," Madden told New Jersey Watchdog last year.

"It's not appropriate," countered Sen. Jennifer Beck, R-Red Bank, one of the few legislators to openly oppose double-dipping. "The pension system is intended to support you at a time you are no longer working. So when you are an active employee, you should not be able to tap into both."

Gov. Chris Christie has welcomed double-dippers into the ranks of his administration. A [New Jersey Watchdog investigation](#) last year found 19 state retirees were rehired under Christie.

Christie's deputy chief of staff, [Louis Goetting](#), gets \$228,860 a year — \$140,000 in salary plus an \$88,860 pension as a state retiree.

"The governor called him out of retirement," said spokesman Michael Drewniak. "And we are grateful to have him,"

Also in Christie's corner are two prominent double-dipping Essex County Democrats who


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crossed party lines last month to publicly endorse the GOP governor’s re-election bid.

Sheriff Armando Fontoura rakes in \$200,221 a year – \$137,917 in salary plus a \$62,304 pension. County Executive Joseph DiVincenzo gets \$222,692 per annum – \$153,831 in salary plus a \$68,861 pension. Both Essex County officials used a loophole in law to “retire” without ever leaving their jobs.

Since 1990, Fontoura has collected \$1.22 million in pension checks since plus a sheriff’s salary that has averaged six figures a year.

“Does it look bad? Yes. No question about it, it looks bad,” Fontoura admitted. “Was it legal? Yes.”

Under loopholes in New Jersey statute, most double-dipping is imperfectly legal.

“It’s an oddball exception to our law,” Beck said. “And that window’s got to close as we deal with the growing pension obligation. We’re not going to be able to allow people to collect a pension while working full-time.”

A reform proposal co-sponsored by Beck could end double-dipping in New Jersey. If enacted, Senate Bill 601 would suspend state pension payments to retirees who return to public jobs that pay more than \$15,000 a year. Their retirement benefits would resume after they permanently leave public employment.

“Let them vote no,” said Beck, referring to her 18 double-dipping colleagues in the Senate and Assembly.

But the measure has failed to reach the floor for a vote. It has been trapped in the Senate’s State Government Committee since it was first introduced in February 2011 by Beck and Sen. Steven Oroho, R-Sparta.

The committee is chaired by Sen. Jim Whelan, D-Northfield, who annually collects a \$35,160 state pension, \$71,564 as a full-time Atlantic City school teacher and \$49,000 as a legislator. Sen. Samuel Thompson, R-Old Bridge, another of the panel’s five members, receives a \$51,996 pension plus his legislative pay.

Assembly Bill 860 – a companion bill sponsored by six Republicans and one Democrat – suffers the same fate. Since May 2011, the measure has been unable to escape the Assembly’s State Government Committee.

Opponents contend hiring double-dippers saves tax dollars, said Beck. Since pensioners already have state-funded health insurance coverage, governmental agencies that hire the retirees don’t need to provide those benefits.

The argument is short-sighted and self-serving. When officials retire early, knowing they can return to public jobs for a second check, they start drawing pension pay and benefits sooner than expected — sometimes 20 years or more, like Sheriff Fontoura.

Overall, there are no real savings, only additional costs. The retirement system is stuck with the bill for health coverage. And even worse, the pension funds — which face a massive \$47.2 billion deficit — are drained by longer payouts to retirees.

“You’re really destroying the fabric of the pension system,” Beck said. “You just can’t afford to do this stuff.”

###

18 NJ LEGISLATORS WHO COLLECT STATE PENSIONS PLUS STATE PAY

			Pension/Yr	Employer at Retirement
Sen	Fred Madden Jr.	D-4	\$85,272	State Police
Assmb	Gordon Johnson	D-37	\$75,492	Bergen County
Assmb	BettyLou DeCroce	R-26	\$55,872	Community Affairs
Assmb	David Rible	R-11	\$55,032	Wall Twp
Sen	Samuel Thompson	R-13	\$51,996	Assembly
Assmb	Gilbert Wilson	D-5	\$50,304	Camden City
Assmb	Diane Gove	R-9	\$49,644	South Regional HS
Assmb	Connie Wagner	D-38	\$46,368	Paramus Bd of Ed
Assmb	Bonnie Watson		\$44,724	
Assmb	Coleman	D-15		Community Affairs



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Sen	James Holzapfel	R-10	\$43,176	Assembly
Sen	Loretta Weinberg	D-37	\$40,860	Assembly
Sen	James Whelan	D-2	\$35,160	Ventor City
Sen	Robert Singer	R-30	\$34,404	Multiple
Assmb	Cleopatra Tucker	D-28	\$33,996	Newark Hous Auth
Sen	James Beach	D-6	\$33,564	Black Horse Pike RSD
Assmb	Joesph Egan	D-17	\$24,216	New Brunswick
Assmb	Ralph Caputo	D-28	\$11,628	Essex County
Assmb	John DiMaio	R-23	\$10,356	Warren County
TOTAL			\$782,064	

TOTAL

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