

EDITORIAL

# Pay hike for state auditors? Yes, but check the results

JULY 06, 2012

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The recent decision by state Auditor Suzanne Bump to raise the salaries of 98 members of her auditing staff is audacious and worth scrutinizing: The raises, of 7.6 percent for 70 of the workers, and 15.7 percent for 28 audit supervisors, will help retain and attract more qualified job candidates, and thereby improve productivity, Bump argues. Since the raises will be covered by savings from low-performing workers whose jobs were eliminated, Bump is essentially promising that a smaller, better-paid staff will outperform a larger, less well-compensated crew.

It's a bet worth taking, for good reasons. First, the higher salaries — averaging \$49,892 per year for field auditors, \$53,416 for senior auditors, and \$66,917 for audit supervisors — aren't exorbitant, and have been set by an outside consultant, Lawrence Associates of Wellesley, based on comparable public- and private-sector jobs. Second, the work of the state auditor's office is uniquely quantifiable, based on the frequency of audits of state agencies and the amount of savings accrued; if Bump's staff isn't delivering more for their money, it will become apparent before the next election. Third, and most significant, she's not increasing the overall budget, just distributing it differently; creative managers should have such leeway.

Nonetheless, by offering large raises to a staff that already got a 5 percent hike two years ago as a parting gift from retiring auditor Joe DeNucci, Bump is setting a dangerous precedent. In most circumstances, public employees shouldn't be reaping large raises at a time when private-sector workers (and taxpayers) are suffering. Other branches of government shouldn't follow Bump's lead without also offering the same guarantees: no hike in the overall budget; a measurable boost in productivity; and pay rates that are set by an outside assessment that takes market conditions into account.

Within these constraints, government agencies can, and should, be free to innovate — to seek new ways to meet their obligations to the public. Bump deserves credit for her willingness to think differently, level with the public, and take responsibility for the outcome. Voters should give her the benefit of the doubt, and then monitor her performance with appropriate diligence.

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