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Inside

■ Sports



Gold Squad tunes up

Members of Downstate's Gold football team scrimmaged Wednesday for Saturday's annual Blue-Gold All-Star Football Game.

Legislators to fight raises

\$2,250 hikes proposed for state lawmakers

By Joe Rogalsky
Delaware State News

DOVER — Last year, proposed legislative pay increases dominated the General Assembly's agenda in January.

This year, the issue might consume considerable time

during the session's final days.

A group of legislators went public Wednesday with their opposition to the \$2,250 pay raise lawmakers are slated to receive when fiscal year 2007 starts July 1.

Lawmakers are earning a base salary of \$40,500 this year.

Their annual session will end in the early-morning hours of July 1.

Legislators against the raises want the Joint Finance Committee, the legislative panel that

writes the state's operating budget, to remove the increases before the full General Assembly votes on the spending plan next week.

The hike is derived from the same formula governing all state workers, but legislators opposed to higher pay said they did not feel comfortable with the size of the increase.

The JFC approved the fiscal 2007 pay policy earlier this month.

When the panel set the Gen-

eral Assembly salaries, three members opposed the hikes — Sen. Steven H. Amick, R-Glasgow; Sen. Catherine L. Cloutier, R-Wilmington; and Rep. Stephanie A. Ulbrich, R-Newark.

"This is not going to be just a minor issue as we get to the end of session," Rep. Ulbrich said.

"As a new member of JFC, I am working very hard to help the budget process but I may end up voting against the bud-

et this year."

The increase would give lawmakers a 5.5 percent raise, which comes on top of the 9 percent raise they received last year.

That increase came at the recommendations of the Delaware Compensation Commission, which every four years suggests salaries for legislators, elected state officials, the judiciary and members of the gover-

See Hikes — Page 10

Hikes

Continued From Page 1
nor's Cabinet that have to be considered in January.

"Times are tough," Sen. Cloutier said.

"I am not comfortable with getting a raise. That's not why I am here. That money could go for other things."

Sen. Cloutier said she plans to bring up the raise issue again when the JFC meets this morning to hash out final details of the fiscal 2007 operating budget.

If a majority of the committee feels the raises are appropriate, she said, she will ask them to at least allow the raises to be voted on in a bill separate from the rest

of the operating budget.

"The chances of us looking at it are very good if Sen. Cloutier comes forward and asks us to consider it," said Rep. Joseph G. DiPinto, R-Wilmington, the panel's co-chairman.

JFC members who supported the raises this year said eschewing them now would cause problems in the future because their pay would lag, causing the compensation commission to suggest bigger percentage increases when it meets again in 2009.

"There was an uproar last year over the compensation commission's recommendations," said Rep. Peter C. Schwartzkopf, D-Rehoboth Beach.



Steven H. Amick



Joseph G. DiPinto



Stephanie A. Ulbrich



Peter C. Schwartzkopf

"If we turn around and do not keep pace with the state employees, then there will be even more uproar the next time the commission makes recommendations because our salaries will not have increased.

"If we keep pace with state employees, there should not be a reason for the commission to

recommend large raises."

Unlike the other two money bills the legislature will consider next week that require a three-quarters majority to pass, the operating budget bill needs a simple majority in each chamber.

Amendments are virtually never proposed and are

approved even less frequently.

"If the budget bill comes up with the raises in there, a number of my colleagues in the House and Senate will vote against it," said Rep. Robert J. Valihura, R-Wilmington.

"We are trying to keep it out of the budget. We do not feel it is appropriate this year."

Sen. Cloutier and Rep. Valihura also unveiled legislation Wednesday that would require the legislative pay raises to be in a bill separate from the rest of the operating budget beginning next year.

The measure also would end the practice of the compensation commission review of General Assembly salaries every four years.

What do you think?

Do you have an opinion on this issue? Post comments at www.newsapforums.com/category17/ or call Sound Off at 741-8203 in Kent or 629-2050 in Sussex.

The bill is expected to be filed today in the Senate.

"It's time to play games and the children have found the toy box," said Senate Majority Leader Sen. Harris B. McDowell, D-Wilmington.

Post comments on this issue at newsapforums.com/forum60

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