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Lawmakers focus on lagging pay for state employees

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Posted: Thursday, January 22, 2015 3:22 pm

By MICHAEL MARTZ Richmond Times-Dispatch

Pay for state employees in Virginia ranks 49th in the nation compared with compensation for private employees, according to the state's top personnel officer.

"Only Georgia is below us," said Sarah Redding Wilson, director of the Department of Human Resource Management.

Virginia ranks even lower — as in last — in total compensation for state employees in a report by the American Enterprise Institute, according to a lobbyist for state workers.

"We've been passed by Mississippi and Alabama — what's the world coming to?" R. Ronald Jordan, executive director of the Virginia Governmental Employees Association, told a House Appropriations subcommittee on Thursday.

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BOB BROWN

House Appropriations Chairman S. Chris Jones, R-Suffolk, has proposed a budget amendment that would give state employees a 2 percent cost-of-living increase in the fiscal year that begins July 1.

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State employees, state police, teachers, sheriff's deputies and constitutional officers all called for immediate relief and a long-term plan to address lagging salaries in a hearing before the appropriations subcommittee on compensation and retirement.

"The bottom line is we need help, we need serious help, and we need it

immediately," said M. Wayne Huggins, executive director of the Virginia State Police Association and a former state police superintendent.

State employees and state police have been fuming since they were left out of Gov. Terry McAuliffe's proposed amendments to the two-year state budget, which included a small increase in starting pay for local deputies to get them over the threshold so they no longer qualify for food stamps.

But the outlook isn't any better for sheriff's departments, according to their chief lobbyist, who cited a turnover rate of 25 percent to 27 percent for deputies in their first year at a starting salary that lags behind marine resource officers and game wardens, Capitol police, state troopers, and police officers in Henrico County.

"They go to any job in their local community where they can get more money," said John Jones, executive director of the Virginia Sheriffs' Association.

While McAuliffe helped sheriffs with deputy pay and payments for housing state inmates, state employees and police are looking to the General Assembly to find money for them in a budget that has been shrunk by \$2.4 billion in revenue since last spring.

"Employee compensation is certainly on our radar screen," said House Appropriations Chairman S. Chris Jones, R-Suffolk.

Jones has been meeting regularly with the chairmen of the Senate Finance Committee — Sen. Walter A. Stosch, R-Henrico, and Sen. Charles J. Colgan, D-Prince William — since before the legislative session began to discuss budget concerns.

Colgan has proposed a budget amendment that would give state employees a 2 percent cost-of-living increase in the fiscal year that begins July 1, which the state employee and state police associations had sought in a letter to members of the General Assembly last week.

While Virginia is second among states in pay for federal employees and 11th in pay for private employees, it ranks 33rd in state worker pay, sliding almost to the bottom compared with private compensation in the commonwealth, Wilson said. Salaries for specific jobs lag an average of 26.3 percent behind the private sector — more for some jobs and less for others.

Almost 2,300 state employees received public assistance in 2013, compared with

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Jim Nolan

less than a dozen in 2007. Almost 1,900 state workers receive food stamps and 10 percent of the work force qualifies for the earned income tax credit for low-income individuals and families.

“Based on this information, it behooves us, as a best-managed state, to devise a strategy to deal with the compensation situation,” Wilson said.

Teachers also are looking for a long-term solution to steady erosion of their salaries compared with the national average for teachers. Teacher pay in Virginia lagged the national average by \$423 in fiscal 1990 but trailed by \$7,456 in the last fiscal year.

“I’m looking for a game plan for how to fix this,” said Robley S. Jones, lobbyist for the Virginia Educational Association.

State police don’t have the luxury of looking long term, Huggins said. In addition to \$90.3 million in cumulative budget reductions in eight years, state police lost \$12.4 million in cuts by McAuliffe this year to help fill the revenue shortfall. Those cuts included about \$4 million in “operating efficiencies,” he said. “It’s our overtime fund!”

The plight of state police has not gone unnoticed by assembly budget leaders. “That’s a top priority of mine,” Jones said.

“There is no question there are some long-term issues that need to be addressed,” he said.

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Cat fight at the General Assembly

It was more polite than most catfights.



Lohmann: Field of songs vying to be next state song is getting crowded

Robbin Thompson’s song “Sweet Virginia Breeze” is joining the ever-growing field of songs being championed to become Virginia’s official state song.

Governor released from VCU Medical Center

Spokeswoman Rachel Thomas said Gov. Terry McAuliffe is resuming his schedule of meetings and private events today.

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Nancy Weston Noel · Top Commenter · Full-time English faculty at [Germanna Community College](#)

Raise taxes--you have been getting blood out of turnips for ages now. I will not benefit from this potential 2% COLA as I am retiring after 30 years of service. But I certainly have been hurt by the lack of salary management on the GA's part. I fume every time I think of what my retirement check would have been if I had gotten more than one raise along the way over the past eight years. I would gladly pay more taxes to support the state employees. We work hard for this Commonwealth for peanuts.

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Ron Melancon · Top Commenter · President\Founder at [Www.dangeroustrailers.org](#)

You deserve more Nancy because you see how these law makers get lavish gifts but it's you who make them look good because it is you who is delegated to do the work

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H.p. Harding · [Randolph-Henry High School](#)

I can believe this story it started 25 years ago under the Wilder administration when he removed step raises and cost of living raises and has continued one notch at a time until now. One must leave their favorite politicians out of it and admit the facts and truth. The George Allen administration did more for employees than any other in over 25 years. Virginia state and private employers have degraded much over the past 25 years .

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Nancy Weston Noel · Top Commenter · Full-time English faculty at [Germanna Community College](#)

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Ron Melancon · Top Commenter · President\Founder

at www.dangeroustrailers.org

In addition lawmakers repay VRS the money you took from the system already. You have short changed that system and you know it

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Patrick Harvey · [Top Commenter](#) · The College of William and Mary

A 2% is better than nothing but only if it's not tied to the "only if we have the money" provision that was attached under GovBob's administration. Hopefully no one will dredge up that human resources mood ring fad of the last century, "pay for performance" that was regularly trotted out but never funded or deployed while I was an employee to justify not giving raises or doing reclassifications of positions. To satisfy the "cheaper is better/smaller government" crowd in the GA perhaps the commission that GovBob set up to reduce or consolidate the number of departments/bureaus/offices/commissions could be revived, to also look specifically at management layers in state entities .Front line state employees and law enforcement personnel are not paid near enough for what is expected, and the "honor of service" that many are fond of harping on doesn't pay bills or buy goods.

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Debbie Brown

While I want to believe that all the elected officials will do right by state employees pay I can't help but know that it's all lip service. Employees with 30+ years don't retire because of VRS and the high cost of health insurance. Current employees job switch between agencies because that's the only way to get a pay raise. Agencies set the pay for their employees. It's more than asking for a simple 2% raise. It's about having a paycheck to meet the rising cost of utilities, food, property taxes, etc. it will take many years to catch up and I just don't see that happening here in VA.

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Charles King · [Top Commenter](#) · Old Dominion University

Raises? No...That would mean an increase in funding, which would require more revenue.... there are more important priorities....we must support the "job creators"....that always works....let's privatize more jobs....quicker the better....we can make this work....just like it is working now....

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Jane Daffron · [Top Commenter](#) · Virginia Tech

It's already been shown that privatizing ups the cost, not decreases it.

So, is that what you want? You can't have it both ways

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Emily Klinedinst · [Top Commenter](#) · Grants Specialist at VCU School of Medicine

Jane, I think Charles is being sarcastic there.

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Susan Estes Robinson · [Top Commenter](#) · Works at Retired

Raising salaries allows state employees to purchase more - that's how you increase jobs, by increasing demand, not that voodoo supply side economics!

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Ron Melancon · Top Commenter · President\Founder at [Www.dangeroustrailers.org](http://www.dangeroustrailers.org)

How about this lawmakers stop taking gifts and ROLEX Watches and pool the money that the lobbist pays you into a crooked leader trust fund and use that money to pay state workers more. Is that s good idea?

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Ron Melancon · Top Commenter · President\Founder at [Www.dangeroustrailers.org](http://www.dangeroustrailers.org)

You want more money enforce all these people who move here who keep their vehicle registered out of state including done Teachets in our Counties

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Mimi Smiley · Top Commenter · Widefield High School

That 2% raise in cola isn't much different than what us in other jobs get. Its reality.

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Jane Daffron · Top Commenter · Virginia Tech

Unfortunately, state employees are, as stated in the article, up to 25% BEHIND that of the private sector and on/near the bottom of the barrel nationwide. When you're even lower than Mississippi, that's BAD. REALLY, really BAD.

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Emily Klinedinst · Top Commenter · Grants Specialist at VCU School of Medicine

No raises for going on 7 years now. Not normal in the private sector.

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