

## **Servant of Two Masters by Dan Jacoby**

The recent FBI investigation of Senate Majority Leader Joseph L. Bruno has highlighted a major flaw in the pay structure of state legislators. Under the current system, the job is classified as part time. Members are allowed to hold other jobs, with unlimited income potential from these jobs. Many members make far more from their “outside jobs” than they do for serving the public.

This naturally leads to obvious conflicts of interest. If a legislator makes twice as much working for, say, a bank, how will that legislator vote on banking issues? If someone runs a business and wants to be able to do things not currently allowed, what are the odds that he or she will not try to change the law to benefit that home business?

The solution is simple, though radical by current standards. Legislators must earn their largest chunk of money as legislators.

This involves several changes in state law. First, the job must be reclassified as full time. Second, the pay must be nearly doubled. \$79,500 may be a lot of money in Elmira, but it's barely upper middle class in Elmhurst. It's simply not enough for a position that should draw the best and brightest. Raising the base salary to \$150,000 would make the job very attractive to almost anyone.

Then comes the tough part – limiting outside income. Instead of just putting a cap on outside income, the limitation should apply to any one employer, or even one line of business. That includes self-run consulting firms – different clients shouldn't count as separate employers. The only exception would be for book authorship. If a legislator writes a best seller, then the royalties should not be capped.

Under this system, legislators can still earn more money from “outside jobs”, but the main single source of income will be working for the taxpayers. In any conflict of interest, the legislator is far more likely to vote in the interest of the legislator's primary employer; if that primary employer is the public, more votes will be in the public interest.

Also, legislators will be far less likely to engage in business activities that lead to investigations and indictments. New Yorkers must be getting sick of all the troubles that our state legislature has had; nine legislators have been indicted on various charges over the past decade. Even the Congress hasn't been so prone to legal trouble.

The investigation of Joseph L. Bruno may end up going nowhere. It's possible, at this stage, that he has actually done nothing wrong. But the spate of investigations and indictments of many of our highest elected officials has got to end. And the state legislature can help, if they only muster up the courage to try something that's not really all that radical.

Governor-elect Spitzer has promised that, “On day one, everything changes.” This change should be part of that “everything”.