

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
STATE OF MONTANA

GREG GIANFORTE  
GOVERNOR



KRISTEN JURAS  
LT. GOVERNOR

May 11, 2023

The Honorable Jason Ellsworth  
President of the Senate  
State Capitol  
Helena, MT 59620

The Honorable Matt Regier  
Speaker of the House  
State Capitol  
Helena, MT 59620

Dear President Ellsworth and Speaker Regier:

Public service is a noble calling, and I thank you and members of the Legislature for your dedicated service to Montana. As has been the case since before our nation's founding, public service comes with personal sacrifice – long hours away from home, less time with family, and appropriately limited compensation. Those who enter public service, by design, are often motivated by a cause greater than themselves. As you and other members of the Legislature know, the sacrifice is real, but the work incredibly rewarding.

We are fortunate in the State of Montana to have a genuine citizen legislature. Montanans elect men and women to represent their communities at our State Capitol for 90 days every two years and to do legislative work as needed between sessions. Our part-time citizen legislature stands in contrast to those in other states like California where professional politicians are full-time legislators, at great cost to taxpayers. Our system keeps government close to the people, and it's part of what makes Montana special.

Public service is demanding, challenging, and rewarding, and I firmly believe a worker is due his or her wages. Periodically, public sector compensation should be appropriately adjusted to keep pace with the private sector, especially amid once-in-a-generation inflation. That's one reason I appreciate that the Legislature recognized the hard work of our dedicated state employees and passed House Bill 13. As you know, House Bill 13 provides state employees with a well-deserved pay increase – a \$1.50 per hour or 4% raise, whichever is greater – on July 1 each year of the upcoming biennium. This modest pay increase will help us retain highly qualified state employees and be more competitive with the private sector, where workers' wages have increased by 16.1% from 2020 to the third quarter of 2022.

This brings me to what Senate Bill 485 proposes: a 74% pay increase for legislators. I firmly oppose legislators' efforts to use taxpayers' hard-earned dollars to fund themselves a 74% pay increase.

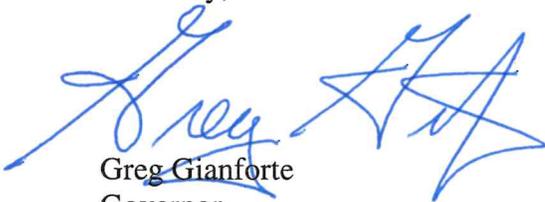
Estimated to cost Montana taxpayers nearly an additional \$2.6 million between 2025 and 2027, a 74% pay increase is inappropriate and excessive, and it would violate the trust Montanans place in us to be good stewards of their money. Furthermore, the Legislature increased legislators' per diem compensation by nearly 30% in March through House Bill 28, at an increased cost to Montana taxpayers of nearly \$2.3 million through 2027.

As you may know, House Bill 13, which implemented the new state employee pay plan and which is detailed above, applies to legislators as well. Beginning the next regular session of the Montana Legislature in January 2025, legislators will earn an additional \$3 per hour, bringing their compensation for the regular legislative session to at least \$299.88 per day – \$128.88 for their salary and \$171 for their per diem compensation, which the Legislature increased this session from \$132.43 and which the Legislature could choose to adjust in 2025.

Therefore, in accordance with the power vested in me as Governor by the Constitution and the laws of the State of Montana, I hereby veto Senate Bill 485: "AN ACT RAISING THE HOURLY RATE OF LEGISLATOR COMPENSATION; AMENDING SECTION 5-2-301, MCA; AND PROVIDING AN APPLICABILITY DATE."

If legislators' pay is to be adjusted, it should be done prudently and in line with what Montanans, including our state employees, see with their paychecks. Better approaches exist than having legislators vote on their own pay, including ballot initiatives, by which legislators could take their pay raises to the people and let Montana voters approve or disapprove them.

Sincerely,



Greg Gianforte  
Governor

Enclosure

cc: Legislative Services Division  
Christi Jacobsen, Secretary of State