

Double-dip, double-cross (editorial)

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Many Ohioans would like to end double-dipping — the practice that allows public employees to collect a retirement pension and a paycheck at the same time, at taxpayer expense. State Rep. Rex Damschroder apparently heard their plea, but only with one ear. House Speaker William Batchelder (R., Medina) declined comment on Mr. Damschroder's bill last week. Mr. Batchelder currently collects more than \$100,000 a year from his public pension to supplement his \$94,000-plus legislative salary.

The Fremont Republican is sponsoring a bill that would prevent public employees from collecting a state pension as long as they continue to work. "It's just not right," he told the Dayton Daily News. "Retire means to stop working. That's what a pension is for."

But these words come with a caveat: Mr. Damschroder's bill would exempt elected officials from the double-dip ban. So while Toledo Schools Superintendent Jerome Pecko would have to give up his job or his pension under the legislation, Toledo Mayor Mike Bell and Lucas County Sheriff James Telb would not.

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He's not alone. According to the liberal advocacy group Innovation Ohio, 16 members of the General Assembly, including state Sen. Edna Brown of Toledo, collect a state pension and a paycheck.

Voters shouldn't be surprised that state lawmakers would seek to exempt themselves from the sacrifices they want to impose on other public employees. This year, they tried to gut the collective-bargaining rights of Ohio government workers, but rejected a provision in the state budget that would have cut their own pay by 5 percent.

According to an analysis by Ohio's eight largest newspapers, including The Blade, 32,000 public employees in Ohio -- teachers, police officers, firefighters, judges, and elected officials --

collected more than \$1 billion in pension checks last year while they continued to work, often at the same job they held before they “retired.” One in four double-dippers works in education.

Mr. Damschroder’s bill likely would have no chance of a legislative hearing, let alone a vote, if it took aim at elected officials’ pay. He probably would have trouble getting any bill passed if he pushed real anti-double-dipping legislation.

At the very least, state lawmakers should reduce the incentives for double- dipping. A sliding scale similar to what Social Security uses to balance pensions and salaries is a possible solution.

But any solution must apply to all state workers equally. If double dipping is “just not right,” it shouldn’t be right for anyone. Mr. Damschroder should withdraw this flawed bill and introduce a replacement when he is prepared to include everyone in the ban.

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