

# EDITORIAL

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## Part-time legislators

Re "Moonlighting pols" (Editorials, Dec. 2):

Once again our vaunted California legislators practice having their cake and eating it too. I'm not surprised so many legislators see nothing wrong in "stiffing" those they serve, but it doesn't mean the electorate has to tolerate it.

Let's return the Legislature to part time. I interviewed numerous nurses elected to various state houses. I was surprised to learn how many served in a part-time capacity and how much they were able to accomplish. Maybe if our Legislature was part time, lawmakers would see the urgency in building consensus and compromise. Maybe we'd see some real work come out of our Legislature for a change, instead of the bickering, foot-dragging and flood of often-useless and redundant bills that have become so commonplace.

— **GENEVIÈVE M. CLAVREUL**  
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## Moonlighting pols

### California deserves full-time lawmakers for full-time pay

**C**ALIFORNIA'S legislators are the highest paid in the land. They have an annual salary of \$150,000 a year, including an array of perks like cars and gas, and expenses of nearly \$200 for every day they are in session. That ought to be enough to pay the bills of a fairly upscale lifestyle.

But a fourth of them are still making money on the side with full careers they never left.

It's a perfectly legal arrangement, even when those with outside sources of income vote in ways that seem like clear conflicts of interest, as was reported last week. It happens routinely.

The rules are clear, but they are not written necessarily with the public interest in mind. That should change. Congress bars its members from moonlighting in activities that present a conflict of interest, and the California Legislature should as well.

The state's rules say, in effect, that legislators can't vote on a measure that benefits only a specific entity, but they are free to vote on anything else as long as it applies generally rather than individually. That's a big gap.

For example, the five-person law firm of Assemblyman Mike Eng, D-Monterey Park, has a \$550,000 contract with the Los Angeles Unified School District, and he has voted many times on issues that resulted in the district getting money from the state. Sometimes the payments to his law firm came shortly after those helpful votes.

The payments were recorded as compensation for help with visas and procedural help with foreign teachers.

State Sen. Dave Cox, R-Roseville, owner of an insurance firm doing business with big health-care companies, is a member of the Senate Health Committee. He has voted several times against creation of a state health insurance program that was lobbied against heavily by clients of his business.

These legislators would say they are voting their conscience, and maybe they are. But it's a conflict of interest when legislators vote on bills affecting their sources of income.

Legislators, in their defense, say their business or professional expertise makes them better legislators, and that's true in most cases. Some complain that the job of legislator doesn't provide a pension (voters took it away from them in a ballot measure), and that's also true.

But what employer allows employees to keep their old full-time job when they accept a new one? California pays its legislators a full-time wage, and should get full-time, dedicated Legislature.

Not one that's just doing it on the side.