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The Times editorial

A slick hike in pay

Members of Congress think they deserve another pay raise.

So they helped themselves to a boost.

Not a large boost, mind you, just a 1.9 percent hike.

But then 1.9 percent of what they make each year is a heck of a lot more than double or triple what that percentage would mean to most of us.

The Republican-controlled Congress voted itself a pay hike of \$3,100 which is scheduled to go into effect in January. That will bring the salary for rank and file members of Congress — not counting the leaders and others who receive additional stipends — to an estimated \$165,200 a year.

The salary boost is labeled a cost-of-living increase, and it certainly ought to handle all of the additional costs they will likely encounter in the next year, costs we all confront regularly — groceries, lodging, utilities ... chauffeurs, party expenses, tuxes, cocktail dresses — all the "normal" daily living requirements.

What was really interesting in these days of constant dogfights between Republicans and Democrats in both the House and Senate — dogfights that lead to practically no significant action in the two bodies — was that the salary increase issue resulted in an absolute truce among lawmakers.

So much so, the Associated Press reported, that the issue was not mentioned on the floor of either the House or Senate as lawmakers worked on legislation whose passage will assure the bigger paychecks.

The AP also explained, as it does every year when Congress quietly passes the pay raises, that lawmakers automatically receive a cost-of-living increase each year unless Congress votes to block it. Interestingly, that particular matter seldom, if ever, comes up for a vote.

By tradition, critics have tried to block increases by attaching a provision to the legislation that provides funding for the Treasury Department. One such attempt succeeded in the Senate earlier in the year, but the provision was omitted from the compromise measure as it moved toward final approval. Now, that's a surprise.

One bright spot was that 4th District Congresswoman Marilyn Musgrave of Fort Morgan voted against the raise. She declared that "...during the current time of budget constraints, it is incumbent that elected officials do for themselves what they ask others to do — cut back."

Obviously her House colleagues didn't agree with her.

We wonder if there will ever come a time when Congress actually does vote to block the automatic raise its members will receive the next year, the year after, the year after and the year...

It's doubtful.

And isn't it a neat arrangement that a vote must be taken to block the raise? Otherwise it's automatic.

Not exactly ingenious, but it greases the skids for an annual pay bump.