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Ridge Signs Legislative Pay-raise Bill

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HARRISBURG — Gov. Ridge, who said during last year's campaign that, if elected, he would not approve a pay-increase bill for legislators or himself, did just that yesterday, signing a measure that provides raises for his office, the legislature and the judiciary.

Without ceremony, Ridge approved a bill that provides an 18.7 percent pay raise, as well as an annual cost-of-living adjustment, for lawmakers. The salary increases will not take effect until after next year's general election, but lawmakers voted to allow themselves to collect unvouchered expenses in the amount of the raise until then.

Pay for the governor and other executive branch officials will go up in the next term, starting in 1999. The governor's salary will rise from \$105,000 to \$125,000. The lieutenant governor's salary will jump from \$83,000 to \$105,000 - a 27 percent increase.

"Pay raises never are popular, but I concluded after careful consideration that this one is merited," Ridge said in a written statement. "Legislators have not had a pay increase in eight years.

"The increase they approved is only a fraction of the increase in the cost of living since 1987. And the legislature has been setting new records for productivity this year, including the unprecedented success of the special session on crime, a budget enacted weeks early with substantial tax cuts, and overhauling the old Department of Environmental Resources.

"There won't be a pay raise for the governor until voters decide who the next governor should be," the statement said.

Last year, in reponse to a questionnaire from The Inquirer, Ridge said: "I would not sign a legislative pay raise into law if one reached my desk. Nor would I sign a measure increasing the governor's salary."

Tim Reeves, spokesman for the governor, said Ridge last year was unaware that the last legislative pay raise had been approved in 1987. Asked why Ridge had changed his mind on increasing the governor's salary, Reeves said: "I can't explain that. I don't know."