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## Lawmakers need to be fair about health care

As the Michigan Legislature pushes forward with plans to require public employees to pay more of their own health insurance costs, lawmakers need to be equally diligent in doing away with their own overly generous retirement perks.

Both issues came up for votes in Lansing this past week, but if history is any indication, public employees are far more likely to take a financial hit sooner than legislators.

The state House on Thursday approved a bill that would limit the amount of money public employers could pay toward health insurance for their workers. The cap would be \$5,500 in annual premiums for an individual; \$11,000 for a couple; and \$15,000 for families. A Senate-approved plan, meanwhile, would require public employees to pay at least 20 percent of health coverage costs. While we support the idea of public employees paying their fair share for health insurance, we think establishing a certain percentage of premiums is a better idea than legislating a specific amount of dollars.

At any rate, it seems likely that House and Senate legislators will reach agreement on this issue as a way to help limit government costs.

Let's hope they are just as diligent in agreeing to do away with their own current retiree health insurance. Under the present system, legislators who have served in state office at least six years and reach the age of 55 are eligible for retiree health coverage at very low cost to them. Such a benefit is virtually unheard of in the private sector anymore, yet efforts to eliminate it in recent years have failed to clear both legislative chambers.

It's not that most legislators don't recognize the incongruity - dare we say hypocrisy? - of demanding more from public employees while enjoying generous taxpayer-subsidized benefits themselves. After all, the House voted 107-3 Thursday to eliminate retiree health care insurance for future and most current lawmakers.

This is the first attempt in the current legislative session to rein in the benefit. Yet similar measures have been passed in previous years, but the two chambers never have seemed to be able to reach agreement on a final version.

So the benefit remains - to the tune of about \$5 million a year to pay for health and dental benefits for 348 retired legislators and their families.

It's time to stop dithering and find common ground to put an end this lavish perk. Then maybe Michiganians will have more confidence that their leaders are being fair when it comes to trimming government spending.

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