

The Shared Standard Compensation Act

A proposal to tie elected officials' pay increases to disability, family, seniors, housing, and income supports.

July- 2026

DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE | ENERGY POLICY

Civic Sketches is a series of draft policy proposals by Lawrence Nault — an independent researcher and policy writer based in Alberta's Badlands. These proposals are working drafts, not party platforms or final answers. They are intended to invite discussion, challenge, and refinement across all levels of government and the broader public.

This policy proposal is published under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Licence (CC BY 4.0). You are free to copy, share, adapt, translate, and build upon this work for any purpose, including use by governments, organizations, advocates, researchers, and members of the public, provided appropriate credit is given to Lawrence Nault and any changes are clearly identified. Full licence: creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

There is a basic test of fairness that should apply to every government.

If the cost of living has risen enough that elected officials need more money, then it has also risen enough that people receiving disability supports, income assistance, family supports, housing supplements, seniors' benefits, and other basic-needs programs need more money too.

Governments should not be able to recognize inflation at the top while denying it at the bottom.

That is the purpose of the Shared Standard Compensation Act: to link increases in political compensation to increases in core social support programs, and to ensure that when governments reduce or freeze supports for the most vulnerable, elected officials feel the same reduction or freeze in their own compensation.

This is not about punishing politicians.
It is about ending insulation.

The Problem

Across governments, elected officials often have access to salaries, pensions, expense accounts, travel allowances, housing allowances, meal allowances, per diems, and other forms of compensation that are reviewed, adjusted, and defended as necessary for the cost of public service.

At the same time, people relying on public supports are often told to wait.

They are told the budget is tight.

They are told there is no room for increases.

They are told that benefits cannot keep pace with rent, food, utilities, transportation, disability costs, medical needs, or the rising price of simply remaining alive.

This creates a structural imbalance.

Those with the most power over public spending are insulated from the consequences of their own decisions, while those with the least power are forced to absorb the damage.

A person on disability support cannot vote themselves a raise.

A low-income senior cannot increase their housing supplement.

A parent relying on family support cannot index their own benefit to inflation.

But elected officials can debate, recommend, approve, or accept increases to their own compensation systems while leaving survival supports frozen, clawed back, or politically delayed.

That should not be acceptable.

The Principle

The principle is simple:

No government should improve the financial position of elected officials while refusing to improve the financial position of people who rely on basic public supports to survive.

If elected officials receive a raise, the designated social support programs should rise by the same proportional amount.

If elected officials receive an increase to housing allowances, travel allowances, daily living allowances, or cost-of-living adjustments, the relevant support programs should also be increased.

If social supports are reduced, frozen, clawed back, or de-indexed, elected officials should experience the same proportional reduction, freeze, clawback, or de-indexing in their own compensation.

A government should not be able to impose austerity downward while protecting comfort upward.

The Policy

The Shared Standard Compensation Act would require that any increase to the salary, pensionable compensation, living allowance, housing allowance, travel allowance, meal allowance, per diem, or cost-of-living adjustment of elected officials automatically trigger an equal or greater proportional increase to designated social support programs.

These programs could include, depending on the jurisdiction:

- disability income supports
- income assistance
- family and child benefits
- seniors' low-income supports
- caregiver supports
- housing supplements
- basic-needs allowances
- other legislated social support programs intended to cover essential living costs

The exact list would vary by province, territory, municipality, or federal program. The principle would remain the same.

If political compensation rises by 3%, designated social supports must rise by at least 3%.

If elected officials receive a 5% increase to housing-related allowances, housing-related supports for low-income recipients must increase by at least 5%.

If elected officials receive increases to meal, travel, or daily living allowances, the basic-needs portions of social support programs must be adjusted by the same proportional amount.

The Reduction Rule

The policy should also work in reverse.

If a government reduces, freezes, claws back, or de-indexes social supports, then elected officials must experience the same proportional reduction, freeze, clawback, or de-indexing in their own compensation and allowances.

If disability supports are frozen for a year, elected officials' salaries and allowances should be frozen for that year as well.

If income supports are cut by 2%, elected officials' compensation should be cut by 2%.

If housing supports are reduced, elected officials' housing allowances should be reduced proportionally.

If basic-needs benefits are de-indexed from inflation, elected officials' compensation should lose the same indexing protection.

The point is not to encourage cuts at the bottom. The point is to make sure governments cannot impose hardship on the most vulnerable while shielding themselves from the same policy choices.

Shared austerity should mean shared austerity.

Shared prosperity should mean shared prosperity.

Legislative Model

A government shall not approve, authorize, or implement an increase to the salary, pensionable compensation, housing allowance, living allowance, travel allowance, meal allowance, per diem, or cost-of-living adjustment of elected officials unless designated social support programs are increased by an equal or greater proportional amount within the same fiscal year.

No compensation increase for elected officials shall take effect until the corresponding social support adjustment has been enacted, funded, and scheduled for payment.

Where a government reduces, freezes, claws back, limits, suspends, or de-indexes designated social support programs, the salary, pensionable compensation, housing allowance, living allowance, travel allowance, meal allowance, per diem, and cost-of-living adjustments of elected officials shall be

reduced, frozen, clawed back, limited, suspended, or de-indexed by an equal or greater proportional amount for the same period.

Reductions to elected officials' compensation shall not be used to justify, require, or trigger reductions to social support programs. The upward link shall be automatic. The downward link shall apply only when governments choose to reduce, freeze, claw back, or de-index supports for people receiving designated benefits.

Why This Matters

People receiving social supports are often the least able to respond to rising costs.

They cannot simply absorb a rent increase.

They cannot always take on extra work.

They may not have savings.

They may already be choosing between food, medication, transportation, heating, school costs, disability needs, and basic participation in community life.

For many people, a frozen benefit is not neutral. It is a cut.

A support payment that does not keep up with inflation means less food, less housing security, less access to care, less mobility, less dignity, and more stress placed on families, charities, shelters, emergency rooms, schools, and local communities.

Meanwhile, political compensation is often discussed in terms of fairness, recruitment, inflation, travel costs, housing costs, and the realities of doing the job.

Those realities may be valid.

But they are not unique to politicians.

If the price of food matters to an elected official, it matters to a person on income assistance.

If housing costs matter to an elected official, they matter to a low-income senior.

If travel costs matter to an elected official, they matter to a disabled person trying to get to appointments.

If inflation matters at the top, it matters more at the bottom.

Safeguards

The Shared Standard Compensation Act would need clear safeguards.

First, governments should not be able to avoid the policy by renaming compensation. A raise should not escape review simply because it is called an allowance, adjustment, stipend, modernization, reimbursement, supplement, or expense update.

Second, social support increases should be automatic. They should not require a separate political vote that can be delayed, watered down, or defeated.

Third, the policy should establish a floor, not a ceiling. Governments should always be free to increase social supports by more than the proportional increase given to elected officials.

Fourth, cuts to political compensation should never trigger cuts to social supports. The reverse link should only apply when governments choose to reduce or freeze support programs first.

Fifth, the policy should apply across the full compensation package, not merely base salary. Housing allowances, daily living allowances, travel allowances, meal allowances, per diems, and cost-of-living adjustments all reflect the cost of living. They should all be part of the calculation.

The Democratic Argument

This policy would not eliminate disagreement over budgets.

It would not solve poverty by itself.

It would not replace the need for adequate disability supports, housing policy, food security, seniors' benefits, employment standards, public health care, or serious anti-poverty measures.

But it would change the political incentives.

It would force governments to confront the double standard that often sits at the centre of public budgeting.

When elected officials are financially insulated from the effects of inflation, austerity, and underfunded social programs, they can make decisions that do not meaningfully touch their own lives.

The Shared Standard Compensation Act would make that harder.

It would say: if you believe there is room for a raise at the top, there must be room for relief at the bottom.

And if you believe there must be restraint at the bottom, then that restraint must begin with you.

Plain-Language Summary

If politicians get a raise, people on basic social supports should get a raise too.

If politicians receive higher housing, meal, travel, or living allowances because costs have gone up, then the supports people rely on for housing, food, transportation, and daily survival should increase by the same proportion.

If governments freeze, cut, claw back, or de-index social supports, politicians should experience the same freeze, cut, clawback, or de-indexing in their own compensation.

No government should be able to protect comfort at the top while imposing hardship at the bottom.

Closing Thought

This proposal is built on a simple idea: political leadership should share the economic reality it creates.

If the cost of living justifies more money for elected officials, it justifies more support for the people least able to absorb those costs.

If austerity is necessary, it should not be aimed only at those with the least power to resist it.

A government that can afford to adjust political compensation can afford to adjust survival supports.

And if it cannot do both, it should not do the first.

About the Author

Lawrence Nault is a Canadian author, filmmaker, and independent researcher based in Alberta's Badlands and Rockies. He writes speculative fiction and YA fantasy, directs documentary film, hosts the podcast *Stone & Signal*, and publishes academic research and policy proposals on digital infrastructure, occupational health, and environmental governance. His work asks hard questions about ecology, technology, and what it means to be human.

Contact

lawrencenault.me/contact/

Website

lawrencenault.me

Policy proposals

lawrencenault.me/policy/

Research

lawrencenault.me/research-policy/

Social

Threads: [@mountainhermitauthor](https://www.threads.net/@mountainhermitauthor)

Bluesky: [@mountainhermit.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/@mountainhermit.bsky.social)