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BAKER: PENSIONS SHOULD BE ON THE LINE IN STATIE PROBE

By Andy Metzger and Chris Triunfo

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BOSTON, JULY 2, 2018.....If State Police stole from the public till by committing overtime fraud, they should be denied a pension, Gov. Charlie Baker said on Monday, reacting to the arrest of three current and former State Police officials last week.

"If anybody is found guilty of stealing from the taxpayers and the toll payers in my opinion they should not receive their pension," Baker said after an unrelated event at the Charles River Esplanade. "That's obviously a decision that will be made by the State Retirement Board but it's pretty clear in state law that if you're convicted of a crime of this nature that you forfeit your pension."

At the outset of an ongoing probe, federal prosecutors accused one current trooper, one former trooper and one former lieutenant of stealing government funds by falsely claiming to have worked shifts patrolling the Massachusetts Turnpike when they had not.

At least 17 troopers suspected of payroll fraud have retired recently, securing annual pension payouts of \$68,000 to \$105,000, according to the Boston Globe, which reported the first payments went out Friday. The Retirement Board can seek to stop pension payments when retirees have been convicted of a crime involving their professional responsibilities, but those moves can trigger legal appeals.

"Allegations like this where you could have widespread, systemic corruption - in some ways petty corruption; it's not showing up for a shift or lying about having worked it - I think you need somebody to look at that, because that kind of rot tends to spread," U.S. Attorney Andrew Lelling told reporters last week. "And in a law enforcement agency, you need its members to be working at the highest level all the time."

An internal investigation into State Police payroll practices began under Richard McKeon, the former State Police colonel, and expanded under his successor Kerry Gilpin, Baker told reporters, noting that information on payroll discrepancies had been sent to the state attorney general's office.

"Well first of all we referred 40 troopers to the attorney general's office as part of the investigation that was begun under Colonel McKeon and expanded under Colonel Gilpin and let's face it, if these folks are guilty of stealing from the Commonwealth, and stealing from the toll payers and the taxpayers, then they should pay the price," Baker said. "But I do think this is a statement about the fact that we are all taking this enormously seriously as we should and that this sort of behavior is not going to be tolerated."

The governor declined to suggest a legal strategy for prosecutors, and said the administration would continue to make information available to them.

"Look, I think it's really important that the attorney general and the U.S. attorney pursue these cases based on the information they received from us in whatever way makes the most sense to them and I'm assuming that they will make the

right calls with respect to the right way to handle that," Baker said. "What we can do and will continue to do as we review information is make it available to them if we believe it rises to the level of a criminal offense."

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