



CONGRESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP HAS ITS PRIVILEGES

SALARIES, PENSIONS, TRAVEL & OTHER
TAXPAYER-FUNDED PERKS

 OPENTHEBOOKS OVERSIGHT REPORT



CONGRESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP HAS ITS PRIVILEGES

SALARIES, PENSIONS, TRAVEL & OTHER TAXPAYER-FUNDED PERKS

PUBLISHED: MAY 2020

By: Adam Andrzejewski - Founder and CEO of Open The Books

Thomas W. Smith - Chairman of Open The Books

“Open the Books is doing the work I envisioned when the Coburn-Obama bill became law. Their innovative app and other tools are putting sunlight through a magnifying glass.” March 11, 2014

Dr. Tom Coburn, Honorary Chairman of OpenTheBooks.com

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(Public Law 109-282, 109th Congress)

“Is the spending in the public interest or the special interest?”

- U.S. Sen. Tom Coburn

“I know that restoring transparency is not only the surest way to achieve results, but also to earn back the trust in the government...”

- U.S. Sen. Barack Obama

PROLOGUE

Serving in Congress is a privilege. In the history of our nation, only 10,363 House members and 1,307 U.S. Senators have been elected. This rare and exclusive club has its benefits.

Our OpenTheBooks Oversight Report, “Congressional Membership Has Its Privilege – Salaries, Pensions, Travel, and Other Taxpayer-Funded Perks,” quantifies these benefits. Last year, members of Congress and their staff, offices, and committees cost taxpayers over \$1.3 billion (2019).

Did U.S. taxpayers get their money’s worth?

First...

In 2019 and for the first two weeks of 2020, the House met in official session 850 hours, and the Senate was in session 1,003 hours. The average American worked 2,192 hours during this period.

But members contend that they work all the time. Between meeting with their caucus, constituents, policy experts, and other stakeholders – in addition to campaigning and fundraising activities – members of Congress stay busy.

Second...

The U.S. House passed two articles of impeachment within ten months of a national election. The price tag – just in salaries and legal costs – amounted to over \$3 million. The opportunity cost of not working on the nation’s problems during this period is not calculable.

Congress passed 106 bills last year, but this represents the slowest pace of legislative production since the 1970’s. Is that the sign of a “do-nothing” Congress? Or is the best Congress an inactive Congress?

As Calvin Coolidge said, “Don’t just do something. Stand there!”

Third...

Congress passed a bipartisan federal budget \$1 trillion in the red during an economic boom and a year of record revenues. Members received only 24 hours to read and vote on the 2,313-page bill. How can our members represent us if they don’t know what’s in the bill?

With public opinion polls consistently showing that up to 83% of the American people view Congress unfavorably, it’s time for change. The American people should insist on bipartisan congressional reforms. The following report highlights areas that deserve a closer look.

WHO WE ARE

American Transparency ([OpenTheBooks.com](https://www.openthebooks.com)) is a public charity. We do not accept government money. Our oversight reports present hard data so citizens, media, think tanks, politicians, and watchdogs can “follow the money.” Our goal is to enhance public discourse with delineated facts.



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*America will never be destroyed from the outside.
If we lose our freedom it will be because we destroyed ourselves.*

Paraphrased from Abraham Lincoln, 1838 speech in Springfield, Illinois

“Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

Lord Acton

TOP 10 HIGHLIGHTS

1 Salary

Members of Congress earn a \$174,000 base salary. The Speaker of the House (\$223,500), Majority and Minority Leaders (\$193,400), and President Pro Tempore (\$193,400) make more.

Outside income is restricted, but members of Congress often received exemptions. We discovered that some members were employed by a federal contractor – reaping billions in taxpayer funds – located in the member’s district while key executives donated five and six figures to the member’s campaign fund.

2 Pension Annuity & Social Security

Members vest in their federal pension in 5 years and can take payments as early as age 50. Members are also eligible for social security. No member of Congress has ever been stripped of their federal pension due to a conviction because the ethics law is riddled with loopholes.

The pension annuity payouts to federal retirees are considered private information and not subject to release under the Freedom of Information Act. It will take an act of Congress to change the law (H.R.2612).

3 Worker’s Compensation

For job related injuries, members are covered under Worker’s Compensation Insurance and Social Security Disability Insurance. Jessie Jackson, Jr. infamously claimed workers comp by successfully arguing that Congress made him mentally ill.

4 Travel Expenditures

Members of Congress spent \$21.2 million on 16,367 overseas trips between 2007 and 2018. Republicans spent \$11.6 million and Democrats spent \$9.6 million during the period.

Last year, the U.S. House spent \$4.3 million on overseas travel. France was one of the top destinations listed on the disclosures published in the Congressional Record. One representative took trips to Italy, Morocco, and France costing taxpayers \$75,000. Another member spent 9 days in Australia costing \$22,400.

5 Perks

Members receive up to 195 days off per year (out-of-session); 72% subsidized healthcare; and taxpayer subsidized \$25 per-month gym membership with sauna, steam room, paddleball, and swimming pool.

Free Parking

The congressional license plates allow members to park illegally; parking is free at Reagan National; flights to and from the district are free and members have a dedicated customer service line to handle reservations.

6 Office Allotment

Based on population, member office allotments average \$1.3 million annually in the House and \$3.2 million to \$5.1 million per year in the Senate. California U.S. Senators receive over \$30 million during their six-year term.

7 Appropriated Settlement Funds

Members have appropriated a fund to bail themselves out of #MeToo and other troubles. Settlements totaling \$17.6 million from 275 cases had an average settlement payout of \$64,000 from years 1997 to 2018.

8 Perks: Elevators & Doormen

Senators have Members Only elevators with doorkeepers who push the buttons. These employees make \$45,000 per year. The doorkeeper supervisors make \$65,000 and the doorkeeper director earns \$95,000.

9 Working Hours

In 2019 and the first two weeks of 2020, the House was in session for only 850 hours and the Senate for 1,003 hours.

10 Legislation

Congress passed a bi-partisan federal budget \$1 trillion in the red. The 2,313 page bill was dropped 24-hours before members voted. No one had time to even read the bill.

PART 1

COST OF CONGRESS - 2019

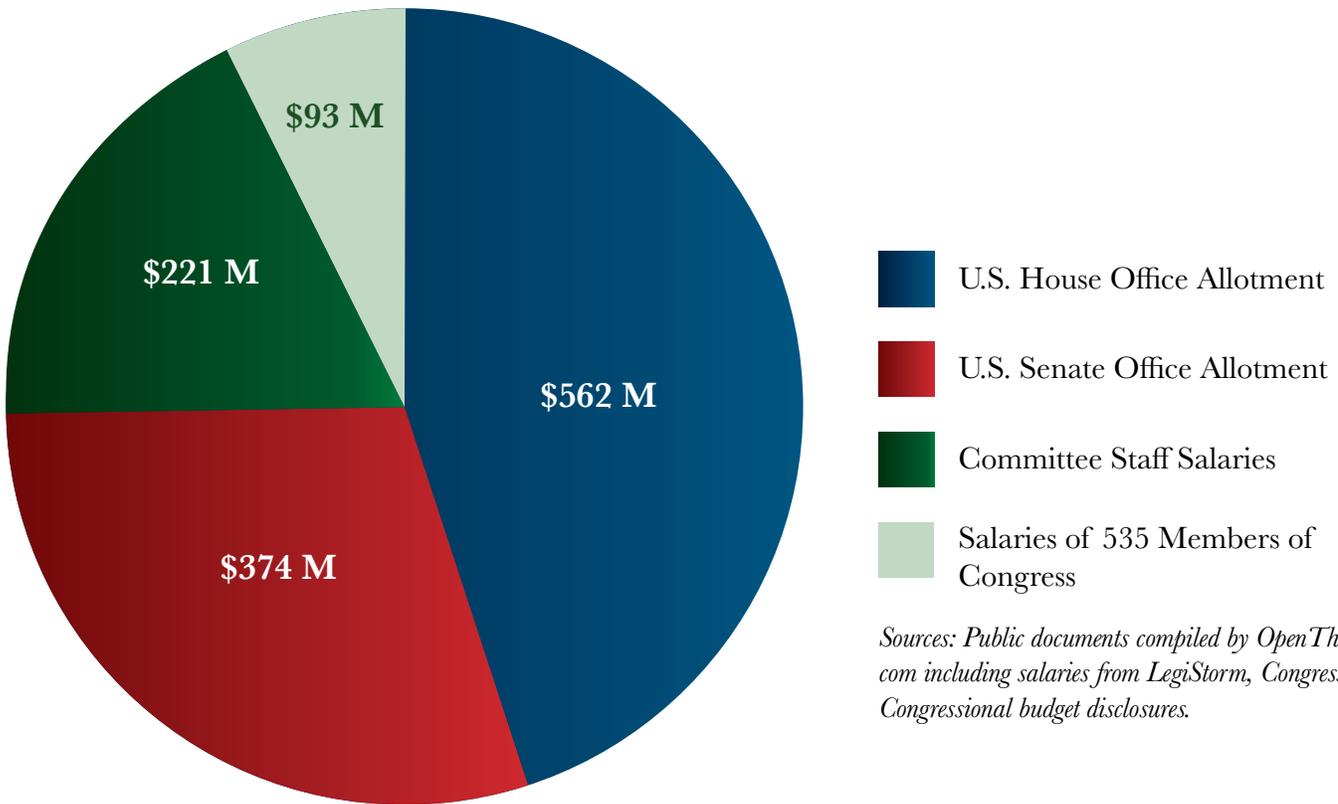
116TH CONGRESS

The 116th Congress convened on January 3, 2019, and will conclude on January 3, 2021. Republicans control the Senate and Democrats control the House. Congress cost the American taxpayer \$1.3 billion last year¹ – and every year. Additionally, we quantified the salary and legal costs of the House impeachment of the president during 2019²; the number of committee meetings in each chamber³; congressional legislative production⁴; and hours in session⁵.



COST OF CONGRESS¹

\$1.3 BILLION: HOW MUCH CONGRESS COSTS THE U.S. HOUSE & SENATE (FY2019)



Sources: Public documents compiled by OpenTheBooks.com including salaries from LegiStorm, Congress.gov, and Congressional budget disclosures.

COST OF IMPEACHMENT²

\$3.06 MILLION

The Heritage Foundation [calculated](#) the price tag for taxpayers of the formal impeachment inquiry. The analysis covers the period from Sept. 24, when House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., declared the House would conduct an impeachment inquiry, to Dec. 13, when the House Judiciary Committee approved the two articles of impeachment in two party-line votes.

The \$3.06 million price tag for taxpayers of the formal impeachment inquiry included the salaries of 106 congressional employees who largely didn't attend to normal duties from September through December.

The analysis also included estimated hourly fees of six lawyers of record for witnesses who appeared during hearings, whether behind closed doors or public. However, the analysis does not cover overtime hours for U.S. Capitol Police or include the cost of executive branch expenses, travel costs for witnesses, or supplies and materials.



U.S. HOUSE

COMMITTEE MEETINGS³

COMMITTEE	2018 TOTAL SALARIES	HEARINGS*	2019 TOTAL MEETINGS HELD
House Appropriations	\$20,868,622	154	173
House Judiciary	\$6,522,083	71	91
House Budget	\$3,872,120	19	20
House Armed Services	\$7,407,215	61	62
House Foreign Affairs	\$7,451,963	77	88
House Transportation and Infrastructure	\$7,572,108	53	59
House Financial Services	\$6,828,206	74	86
House Education and Labor	\$6,068,024	51	61
House Small Business	\$2,451,122	59	63
House Science	\$5,003,033	61	62
House Natural Resources	\$5,838,358	99	107
House Oversight and Reform	\$7,875,542	90	108
House Agriculture	\$4,478,474	29	32
House Veterans Affairs	\$3,378,424	63	75
House Intelligence	\$5,041,077	30	30
House Ways and Means	\$7,877,618	36	46
House Energy and Commerce	\$9,192,171	86	101
House Homeland Security	\$6,335,388	52	59

*Excludes nominations hearings and markups

BILLS CONSIDERED	BECAME LAW	COST PER HEARING	SOURCE
4	6	\$135,511	https://appropriations.house.gov/events/hearings?subcommittee=750&congress_number=All
89	18	\$91,860	https://judiciary.house.gov/calendar/
15	6	\$203,796	https://budget.house.gov/legislation/hearings
16	1	\$121,430	https://armedservices.house.gov/hearings
110		\$96,779	https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/hearings
58	6	\$142,870	https://transportation.house.gov/committee-activity/hearings
83	5	\$92,273	https://financialservices.house.gov/calendar/?EventTypeID=577&Congress=116
37	3	\$118,981	https://edlabor.house.gov/hearings-and-events
16		\$41,544	https://smallbusiness.house.gov/activity/
39	1	\$82,017	https://science.house.gov/hearings
178	5	\$58,973	https://naturalresources.house.gov/hearings
94	23	\$87,506	https://oversight.house.gov/legislation/hearings
15		\$154,430	https://agriculture.house.gov/calendar/
78	10	\$53,626	https://veterans.house.gov/events/hearings
4		\$168,036	https://docs.house.gov/Committee/Committees.aspx?Code=IG00#
71	5	\$218,823	https://waysandmeans.house.gov/legislation/hearings
164	10	\$106,886	https://energycommerce.house.gov/committee-activity
61	3	\$121,834	https://homeland.house.gov/activities/hearings

Salary info came from legistorm.com
 Bills considered/passed came from congress.gov



U.S. SENATE

COMMITTEE MEETINGS³

COMMITTEE	2018 TOTAL SALARIES	HEARINGS*	2019 TOTAL MEETINGS HELD
Senate Appropriations	\$13,738,681	51	64
Senate Armed Services	\$6,216,638	56	68
Senate Finance	\$7,805,624	17	25
Senate Banking	\$4,395,107	32	35
Senate Small Business	\$2,208,801	23	28
Senate Intelligence	\$5,214,472	54	54
Senate Energy and Natural Resources	\$4,448,441	33	62
Senate Commerce	\$6,294,047	47	60
Senate Agriculture	\$4,081,894	11	16
Senate HELP	\$8,082,138	11	21
Senate Foreign Relations	\$5,878,913	39	70
Senate Environment and Public Works	\$4,186,098	26	40
Senate Judiciary	\$7,685,024	42	87
Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs	\$7,759,206	32	49
Senate Budget	\$3,885,508	10	11
Senate Indian Affairs	\$1,792,801	16	28
Senate Veterans Affairs	\$2,343,738	10	15
Senate Aging	\$1,900,257	16	16

*Excludes nominations hearings and markups

BILLS CONSIDERED	BECAME LAW	COST PER HEARING	SOURCE
1		\$269,386	https://www.appropriations.senate.gov/hearings
0	2	\$111,011	https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/hearings
5		\$459,154	https://www.finance.senate.gov/hearings
37	2	\$137,347	https://www.banking.senate.gov/hearings
28	1	\$96,035	https://www.sbc.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/hearings
		\$96,564	https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/hearings
112	1	\$134,801	https://www.energy.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/hearings-and-business-meetings
106	3	\$133,916	https://www.commerce.senate.gov/hearings
1		\$371,081	https://www.agriculture.senate.gov/hearings
29	2	\$734,740	https://www.help.senate.gov/hearings
88	1	\$150,741	https://www.foreign.senate.gov/hearings
25	5	\$161,004	https://www.epw.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/hearings
30	8	\$182,977	https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/hearings
120	22	\$242,475	https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/hearings
3		\$388,551	https://www.budget.senate.gov/hearings
34	3	\$112,050	https://www.indian.senate.gov/hearings
33	4	\$234,374	https://www.veterans.senate.gov/hearings
N/A	N/A	\$118,766	https://www.aging.senate.gov/hearings

Salary info came from legistorm.com
 Bills considered/passed came from congress.gov

LEGISLATION⁴

Legislative production is one measure [used to evaluate](#) the effectiveness of Congress. The chart below shows the bills, resolutions, and other legislation passed in two-year periods of each Congress since 2000. (The current 116th Congress still has a year to go.)

CONGRESSIONAL PRODUCTION (2000 - CURRENT)							
CONGRESS	ENACTED LAWS	PASSED RESOLUTIONS	GOT A VOTE	FAILED LEGISLATION	VETOED BILLS (W/O OVERRIDE)	BILLS INTRODUCED	TOTAL
106th (1999 - 2000)	604	769	650	33	12	8,772	10,840
107th (2001 - 2002)	383	681	602	16	0	9,107	10,789
108th (2003 - 2004)	504	865	694	17	0	8,589	10,669
109th (2005 - 2006)	483	1,027	597	31	1	10,933	13,072
110th (2007 - 2009)	460	1,435	861	37	7	11,242	14,042
111th (2009 - 2010)	385	1,464	601	31	2	11,192	13,675
112th (2011 - 2013)	284	722	390	38	0	10,865	12,299
113th (2013 - 2015)	296	663	474	20	0	9,184	10,637
114th (2015 - 2017)	329	708	661	22	9	10,334	12,063
115th (2017 - 2019)	443	758	867	14	0	11,474	13,556
116th (2019 - present)	106	432	481	18	6	9,234	10,277

Source: <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/statistics>

HOURS IN SESSION BREAKDOWN⁵

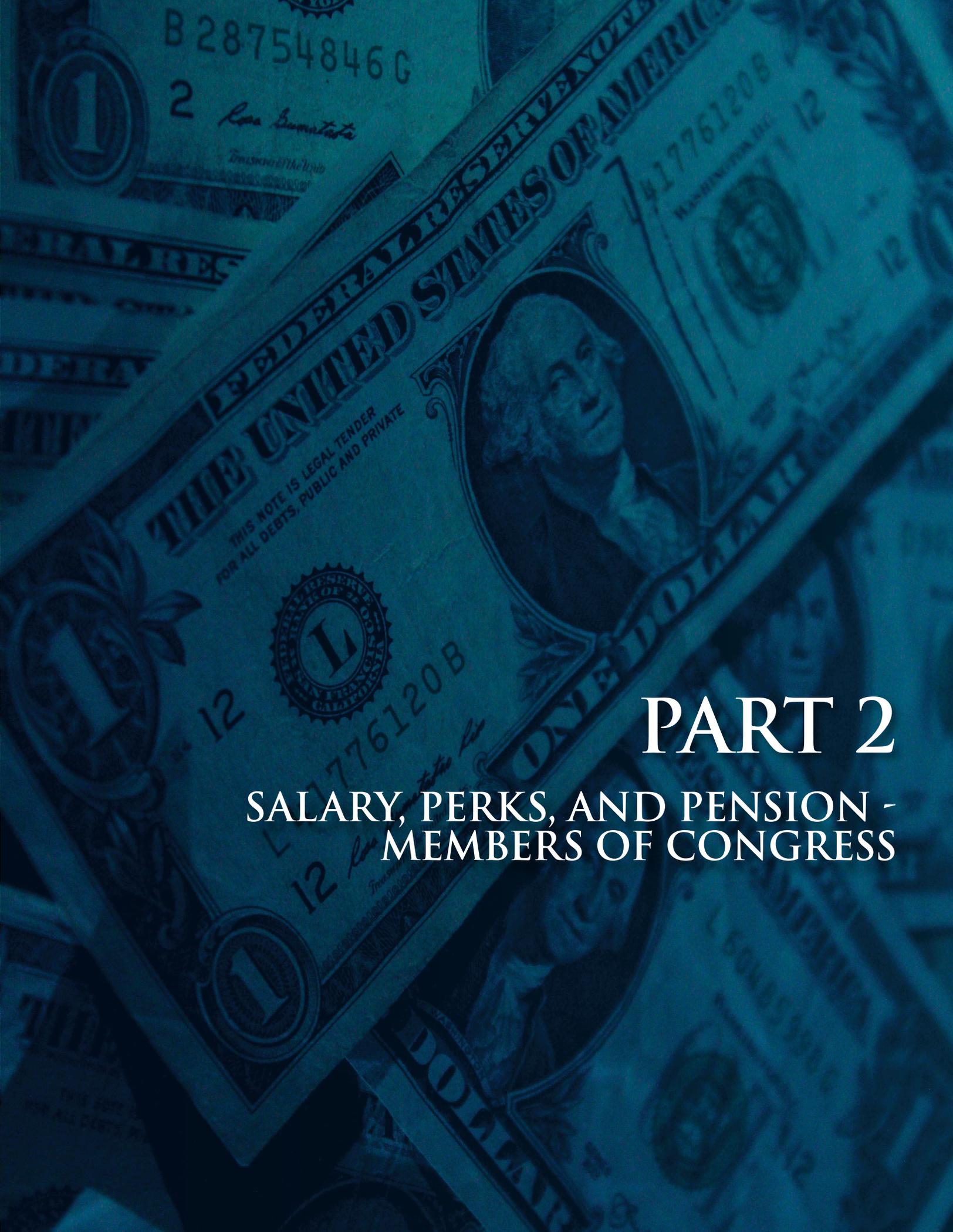
This chart shows the hours spent in session by the House and Senate during the period January 3, 2019 through January 16, 2020. For comparison, an American worker with a 40-hour work week spent 2,192 hours on the job.

HOUSE	
116TH HOUSE (2019-2020)*	HOURS
Debate	275
Special Orders	127
Votes	193
One Minute Speeches	64
Morning Hour	55
Opening Procedures	6
Other	130
Total	850

Days in Session: 173
 *Data through January 16, 2020
 Source: CSPAN2

SENATE	
116TH SENATE (2019-2020)*	HOURS
Quorum Calls	210
Debate	274
Votes	217
Other	302
Total	1003

Days in Session: 170
 *Data through January 16, 2020
 Source: CSPAN2



PART 2

SALARY, PERKS, AND PENSION - MEMBERS OF CONGRESS

SALARY



Being on a committee or having a special assignment does not entitle any member of Congress to more money. Members earn \$174,000 per year, unless specifically delineated in the chart below:

SALARIES FOR MEMBERS OF CONGRESS	
POSITION	SALARY
General Representative And Senator	\$174,000
Majority And Minority Leader	\$193,400
President Pro Tempore	\$193,400
Speaker Of The House	\$223,500

Source: Salaries of Members of Congress: Recent Actions and Historical Tables

RESTRICTIONS

Outside earned income is allowed subject to the following restrictions:

- ✓ Restricted to 15% of the annual rate of basic pay for a level II federal employee of the Executive Schedule, which as of 2016 made the limit \$27,495.
- ✓ Certain types of outside earned income are completely prohibited. For example, compensation from affiliating with, practicing, or being employed by an entity that provides professional services involving a fiduciary relationship, except for the practice of medicine.
- ✓ Permitting their name to be used by any entity.
- ✓ Serving as an officer or member of the board of an entity for compensation.
- ✓ Receiving compensation for teaching, without the prior notification and approval of the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct.
- ✓ Honorariums are completely prohibited. Honorarium is defined as a “payment for a service on which custom or propriety forbids a price to be set.”

Source: Congressional Research Service: Congressional Salaries and Allowances: In Brief, 4/11/18

CASE STUDIES

OUTSIDE EMPLOYMENT/CONFLICTS-OF-INTEREST

REP. JIM COOPER (D-TN)

Vanderbilt University is based in Cooper’s congressional district. Vanderbilt’s executives and employees are the largest donors to Cooper’s campaign, contributing \$135,261 since 2002.

Between 2005 and 2018, Vanderbilt employed Cooper as an adjunct professor. During this period, Cooper earned nearly \$250,000 in total salary.

The university received \$2.6 billion in federal contracts, grants and direct payments between FY2014 and FY2018.

Cooper sits on the Budget Committee and the Oversight & Government Reform Committee.

For more information, read our [oversight report](#).

REP. TOM COLE (R-OK)

Cole is a partner in the polling and campaign consulting firm Cole, Hargrave, and Snodgrass. Since 2002, Cole’s campaign fund hired this firm and paid it \$224,000. Cole has earned roughly \$320,000 in “management fees” from his firm since 2003.

Cole also has a significant equity stake in the partnership. On congressional disclosure forms, Cole values his interest in the firm between \$250,000 and \$500,000. Furthermore, Cole disclosed receiving dividends/capital gains amounting to a grand total of between \$175,000 and \$575,000 (2003-present).

For more information, read our [oversight report](#).

MEMBERSHIP HAS ITS PRIVILEGE

MEMBER OF CONGRESS:
U.S. Rep. Jim Cooper (D)
TN-5 | Elected Since 2002
Oversight & Government Reform Committee
Committee on the Budget

VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY
Located in Cooper’s District

VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY RECEIVED*
(FY2014-FY2018)

#1 CAMPAIGN DONOR!
\$135,261¹

EMPLOYED BY**
VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

\$250,500^{3,4}
est. total cash compensation
(2006-2017)

\$2.0 BILLION
in Federal Grants

\$31.2 MILLION
in Direct Payments

\$155.2 MILLION
in Federal Contracts

Learn more at [OpenTheBooks.com](#)

* Campaign donation source: OpenSecrets.org. The organization itself did not donate; rather the money came from their key executives – including the University Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Deans, and other employees.
** Federal checkbook data disclosed via Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006.
*** Source: Congressional annual disclosure.
**** Congressional disclosures (2018) show Cooper ceased employment at Vanderbilt University.

MEMBERSHIP HAS ITS PRIVILEGE

MEMBER OF CONGRESS:
U.S. Rep. Tom Cole (R)
OK-4 | Elected Since 2002
Appropriations Committee

FEDERAL CONTRACTOR*
the Chickasaw Nation
Located in Cole’s District

CAMPAIGN COMMITTEE HIRES COLE’S FIRM:**
Cole, Hargrave & Snodgrass Consulting Firm³

#1 CAMPAIGN DONOR!
\$258,461¹

THE CHICKASAW NATION RECEIVED**
(FY2014-FY2018)

\$687.7 MILLION
in Federal Grants

\$12.4 MILLION
in Federal Sub-Grants

\$434,000
from Program 1033
including Mine-Resistant Vehicles

\$224,000⁴
Committee pays firm

\$320,000³ & dividends of at least
\$175,000³ (since 2003)

Learn more at [OpenTheBooks.com](#)

* Campaign donation source: OpenSecrets.org. The organization itself donated, as well as its affiliates - executives, employees and lobbyists.
** Federal checkbook data disclosed via Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006.
*** Source: Congressional annual disclosures since 2002.
**** Source: OpenSecrets.org. Cole’s firm paid by committee since 2002.

PERKS



THE PIN

Members have worn special pins since 1975. Nicknamed “Ego Pins,” Capitol Police use them to [fast-track members](#) around security lines. Spouses are issued their own pins with the same design and a different background color.



THE LICENSE PLATE

Members of Congress [have immunity](#) from many routine parking tickets in the District of Columbia. Members are exempt from parking tickets when on “official business” and can park in any “available curb space.” However lawmakers must still obey restrictions for rush hour parking, loading zones, and fire hydrants. Members cannot speed or run red lights.



RETIREMENT ASSOCIATION

Not re-elected or retired from Congress? Former members [can join](#) the FMC - The United States Association Of Former Members Of Congress. This organization has membership of over 500 former representatives and senators. Leftover campaign funds can purchase membership in this organization.



FREE PARKING

Members [can park for free](#) at Reagan National Airport, which cost taxpayers more than \$132,000 in 2015.



SUBSIDIZED GYM MEMBERSHIP

Members have [access](#) to an on-site gym with a swimming pool, sauna, steam room, paddleball, and many other features for \$25 per month.



DAYS OFF

Members had 195 days off (out-of-session) and only 170 (Senate) and 173 (House) - in session days last year. Total work days per year: 260 (52 weeks times 5 days per week).



FREE FLIGHTS

Taxpayers foot the bill for many of the flights that members of Congress make between their home state and Washington, D.C. Many major airlines have a [dedicated](#) Congressional call desk to sort out any airline issues, and members can reserve seats on multiple flights while only paying for the one they take.



BEAUTY SALON

The senate hair care service is open to the public, but key lawmakers get appointment priority over the public and newer members.



CAPITOL SUBWAY

There is a [subway line](#) dedicated for the sole use of members of Congress and their staff. The line runs from congressional office buildings to the Capitol.



ELEVATORS AND DOORMEN

U.S. senators enjoy the services of 46 “doorkeepers” and “doorkeeper supervisors” who keep security protocols and serve as attendants on the exclusive Senate elevators.

Senate doorkeepers cost an estimated \$10 million over the last five-years. The 44 doorkeepers make about \$45,000 a year with the supervisor earning approximately \$65,000 and the director earning \$95,000.

Source: *LegiStorm*

EXEMPTIONS FROM LAWS

Members of Congress are [exempt](#) from several federal laws, including:

-  Freedom of Information Act
-  Prosecution for retaliating against employees who report safety and health hazards
-  Investigatory subpoenas to obtain information for safety and health probes
-  Having to train employees about workplace rights and legal remedies
-  Protections against retaliation for whistleblowers
-  Record-keeping requirements for workplace injuries and illnesses
-  Having to post notices of worker rights in offices

APPROPRIATED SETTLEMENT FUNDS

 The U.S. Treasury has a fund solely devoted to paying out settlements. This [fund](#) is administered through the Office of Compliance, which is overseen by the House Administration and Senate Rules committees. Monies are paid to settle workplace disputes on Capitol Hill – including sexual harassment cases.

 From 1997 to 2018, [settlements](#) totaling \$17.6 million from 275 cases had an average settlement payout of \$63,973. There were two spikes in this 20-year period: 2002 and 2007. In 2002, ten cases were settled with a total payout of \$4 million (average payout \$397,408). In 2007, twenty-five cases were settled for \$4.1 million (average payout \$162,171).

 In 2018, 10 cases were settled for a total payout of \$338,816. Statistics show that the #1 issue was harassment/hostile environment.

WORKER'S COMPENSATION

Worker's compensation [provides](#) cash and medical benefits to workers who become injured or ill during the course of employment or to family of survivors killed on the job.

AMONGST OUR FINDINGS

- Members of Congress are covered under federal worker's compensation statutes.
- Members also pay into and receive Social Security Disability Insurance coverage, which pays benefits to those who qualify based on a disability or meeting medical criteria.



CASE STUDY

DID CONGRESS CAUSE REP. JESSE JACKSON'S MENTAL ILLNESS?

In 2012, Jesse Jackson, Jr., (D-IL) [was approved](#) for \$138,400 in worker's compensation and social security disability payments. Infamously, Jackson made the case that Congress made him mentality ill.

During this period, Rep. Jackson was [convicted](#) of using about \$750,000 in campaign funds for unlawful expenditures including vacations, celebrity memorabilia, and other items. According to news reports, the worker's compensation and social security disability stems from his bipolar disorder and depression. If Jackson still qualifies today, then he has received approximately \$1 million in payments since 2012.

HEALTHCARE

Members' [health insurance](#) is 72% taxpayer-subsidized if the member elects for the gold tier plan from the Affordable Care Act, and the rest of the premium can be paid with pre-tax dollars. Dental, vision, and long-term care insurance plans are 100% paid for by the members with pre-tax dollars.

AMONGST OUR FINDINGS:

-  Beyond health insurance, members enjoy emergency medical assistance through the Office of the Attending Physician for an annual fee. In 2008, that fee was a mere \$611.
-  Members are eligible for free medical outpatient care at military facilities in the Capital region only. The Federal Employees Group Life Insurance Program is also [open](#) to members of Congress.
-  Retirement health insurance [is available for members](#) if they have had five years of continuous healthcare coverage under the D.C. SHOP plans.

Learn more from the [Congressional Research Service report](#).

PENSION ANNUITY & SOCIAL SECURITY

Federal retirement annuities (taxpayer-paid pensions) [vest after](#) five years of service. Members also pay into social security and are eligible for the benefit at the attained age.

AMONGST OUR FINDINGS

-  Federal pensions are not subject to Freedom of Information Act requests and are considered private information. This can only be changed through legislation. Representative Jody Hice (R-GA) introduced a bill ([H.R. 2612](#)) that would open up these pensions to transparency. **Even in the union stronghold states of California, Oregon, New York, and Illinois, individual public employee retirement pensions are subject to open records disclosure.**
-  No member of Congress [has ever lost their pension](#) due to a conviction, according to Anthony Marucci, the Director of Communications at U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM).



THE CASE FOR FEDERAL PENSION TRANSPARENCY

 READ REPORT

“THERE HAS NOT BEEN A MEMBER TO DATE THAT HAS BEEN STRIPPED OF HIS OR HER RETIREMENT BENEFITS DUE TO A CONVICTION.”

Anthony Marucci, Director of Communications, Office of Personnel Management
October 9, 2019

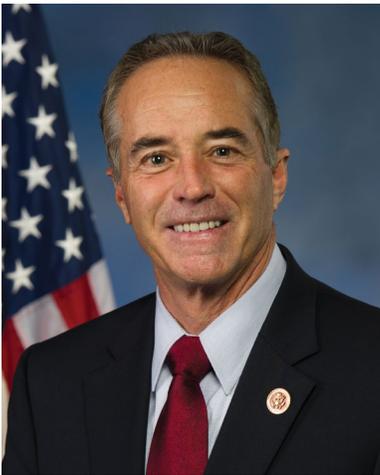
CASE STUDIES

Members of Congress [can be stripped](#) of their federal pensions for convictions resulting from 29 distinct felonies. Since 2007, there have been three attempts to reform congressional ethics laws. However, there are still loopholes in the law.



CHAKA FATTAH (D-PA)

Fattah was a representative for Pennsylvania's 2nd district. In 2016, Fattah was convicted on 23 counts of racketeering, fraud, and other corruption charges and sentenced to 10 years in jail. He is continuing to [collect](#) pension benefits even though he's been sitting in prison for two years.



CHRIS COLLINS (R-NY)

Collins was a representative for New York's 27th district. In 2018, Collins was charged with insider trading and making false statements. Under a 2012 reform law, he [could be the first](#) member of Congress to be stripped of federal pension benefits. Even so, [Collins will retain](#) his 401(k), including the federal match, and health benefits.



DUNCAN HUNTER (R-CA)

Hunter was a representative for California's 50th district. In 2019, Hunter was charged with 60 counts of breaking federal law. In December, Hunter [pleaded guilty](#) to a single felony count. Analysis by Common Cause lawyers predicted that Hunter will still receive his federal pension. We estimated Hunter's future pension at life expectancy to pay out \$1.2 million.

CONGRESSIONAL PENSION PLAN OPTIONS

NOTE: Congressional pensions are not subject to the Freedom of Information Act and are considered private information. [Learn more.](#)

4 OPTIONS FOR MEMBERS ELECTED BEFORE 1984

Dual Coverage

The Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) and social security

CSRS Offset

CSRS and social security but with CSRS contributions and benefits reduced by the amount of social security contributions and benefits

Federal Employees' Retirement System (FERS)

FERS basic annuity, social security, and the Thrift Savings Plan

Social Security Only

FOR MEMBERS SINCE 1984

Federal Employees' Retirement System (FERS)

Social Security

FERS Basic Annuity

A monthly pension based on years of service and the average of the three highest consecutive years of basic pay

Thrift Savings Plan

Can deposit up to \$19,000 in 2019 (those 50 and older can make additional catch-up contributions of up to \$6,000 annually). Their employing agency matches up to 5% of the pay.

RETIREMENT UNDER CSRS HAS 4 DIFFERENT CONDITIONS

1 Retirement with an immediate, full pension
Members 60 or older with 10 years of service or 62 or older with five years of civilian federal service, including Congress.

2 Retirement with an immediate, reduced pension
Members between the ages of 55 to 59 with at least 30 years of service.

If a 55 to 59-year-old member has only served 25 years, and they separated for a reason other than resignation or expulsion, this condition applies to them. Members 50 or older with 20 years of service, or after serving nine years in Congress.

3 Retirement with a deferred, full pension
Member leaves Congress before reaching the minimum age required to receive an immediate, full pension, and delays receiving their pension until reaching the age of full benefits. That age is 62 if the member had five to nine years of federal service or 60 if the member had at least 10 years of service in Congress.

4 Retirement with a deferred, reduced pension
Member that retired before age 50 and had at least 20 years of federal service with at least 10 years as a member of Congress.

RETIREMENT UNDER FERS HAS 4 DIFFERENT CONDITIONS

1 Retirement with an immediate, full pension
Members 62 or older with at least five years of federal service, members 50 or older with at least 20 years of service, and members of any age with at least 25 years of service.

2 Retirement with an immediate, reduced pension
Members between the ages 55 or older born before 1948 with at least 10 years of service, age increased to 56 for members born from 1953 through 1964, and age increased to 57 for those born in 1970 or later.

3 Retirement with deferred, full pension
Former members aged 62 or older with at least five years of federal service.

4 Retirement with a deferred, reduced pension
Former members aged 55 to 57 (depending on year of birth) who have completed at least 10 years of federal service. Pension annuity is permanently reduced if it begins before 62.



PART 3

EXTRAS - TRAVEL & OFFICE ALLOTMENT



TRAVEL EXPENDITURES

CONGRESSIONAL TRAVEL RULES

Activities **must be relevant** to the responsibilities of the officeholders and their committees.

Official travel expenses must be ordinary and necessary.

- Cost of transportation
- Housing
- Food
- Incidentals – parking, tolls, ticket change fees

THERE ARE 3 WAYS TO BE REIMBURSED FOR TRAVEL IN CONGRESS:

1. REIMBURSEMENT FOR OFFICIAL TRAVEL

- Paid for from the respective committee budget with the prior approval of the committee leader.
- The House imposes additional rules for official travel reimbursement, including a written request to the leader of the committee or subcommittee. These requests include the purpose of the trip, dates of the trip and event, location of the event, and the names of the members and congressional staff who will be traveling. House members must submit a written report of the trip to the committee leader within 15 days of the completion of the trip.

2. REIMBURSEMENT FOR OFFICIAL FOREIGN TRAVEL

Senate

- Official foreign travel must be approved by the committee leader. Depending on the Senate committee, the vice chairman's authorization must also be obtained, and member must file a foreign travel authorization request naming the trip's purpose and extent, along with a full after-trip report.

House

- Official foreign travel may be approved by either the committee leader or the Speaker of the House. The House requires the member to submit an expense report to the committee leader within 60 days of the end of the trip, with details such as dates of travel, per diem allowances, transportation allowances, additional official expenditures, and total official expenditures in appropriated funds and foreign currencies.
 - Once a quarter, committee leaders create a consolidated report of appropriated funds expenditures, foreign currency expenditures, and total expenditures for every member of the committee.

3. REIMBURSEMENT FOR CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATIONS (CODEL)

For this type of travel, the committee leader, ranking member, or senior employee writes a report for the entire group and submits it to the Chair of the Committee on Foreign Relations (Senate) or the Chair of the Committee on International Relations (House). This report includes per diem expenditures, transportation expenditures, and miscellaneous expenditures.

The reason for all these expenditures must also be included. Within 60 days of the beginning of the next regular session of Congress, consolidated reports of the committee's official foreign travel expenses must be submitted to the Secretary of the Senate and the Clerk of the House. This report includes the names of the members traveling, expenditure amounts, expenditure purposes, and total expenditures.

Source: [Public Citizen, Government Sponsored travel rules for Congress, updated 5/23/2019](#)



HOUSE-SPECIFIC TRAVEL RULES

- Ordinary and necessary do not include:
 - Cost of living
 - Commuting
 - Consuming alcohol
 - Un-canceled reservations except when beyond a member's control
- Only members, employees, consultants, vendors, and witnesses can be reimbursed for official travel without the written approval of the Speaker of the House.
- Members can invite non-members (i.e., spouses) to official events and pay their travel through campaign or personal funds.
- Limit of 60 consecutive days for official travel
- House members are allowed to use free travel, mileage, discounts, upgrades, coupons, and other promotional travel awards accumulated during official travel at their discretion.

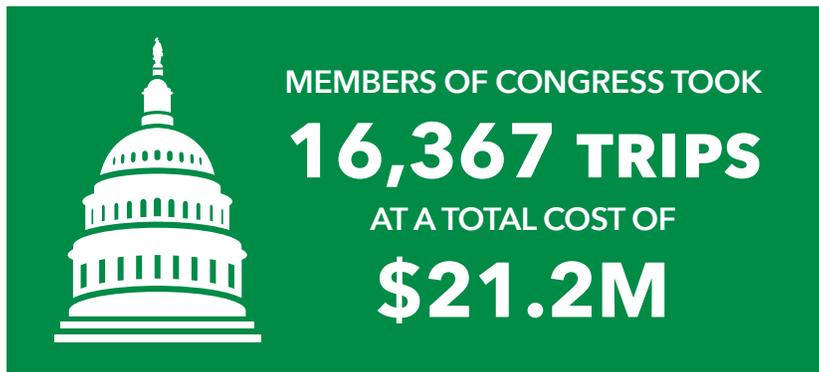


SENATE-SPECIFIC TRAVEL RULES

- Only members and witnesses in certain circumstances may receive reimbursement for official travel.
- Members can invite non-members (i.e., spouses) to official events and pay their travel through campaign or personal funds.
- No limit to the length of the official travel
- Senators are not allowed to use any promotional travel awards. Instead, they are turned over to the office that sponsored the official travel. This does not include frequent flyer miles collected by members, their spouses, or their children between Washington, D.C., and their home state.

CASE STUDIES

I. CONGRESSIONAL FOREIGN TRAVEL (2007-2018)



TOP 5 DESTINATION COUNTRIES

Isreal	\$1.1 million
United Kingdom	\$954,589
France	\$861,393
Germany	\$744,536
United Arab Emirates	\$742,624

TOP 5 TRAVELERS BETWEEN THE YEARS 2007 AND 2018 WERE ALL HOUSE MEMBERS

Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA)	\$484,906
Rep. Eliot Engel (D-NY)	\$328,390
Rep. Edward Royce (R-CA)	\$287,292
Rep. Gregory Meeks (D-NY)	\$280,916
Rep. Christopher Smith (R-NJ)	\$248,928

Source: Berkeley.edu

II. U.S. HOUSE FOREIGN TRAVEL (2019)

The chart below shows a snapshot of foreign travel expensed by House reps during 2019. House reps spent \$4.3 million. However, not all of the calendar year 2019 travel has been posted yet (as of 1/20/2020). So, the numbers are sure to increase.

FOREIGN TRAVEL CALENDAR YEAR 2019 U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES					
RANK	VISITED COUNTRY	SUM OF AMOUNT*	RANK	VISITED COUNTRY	SUM OF AMOUNT*
1	Various	\$3,265,483.79	20	Central America, Ethiopia, Eritrea	\$16,125.03
2	France	\$209,041.12	21	Croatia	\$15,575.34
3	Various (including non-European)	\$170,120.91	22	UAE/Saudi Arabia	\$13,927.60
4	Argentina, Panama, Peru, Honduras	\$59,075.27	23	Malaysia/Singapore	\$11,980.00
5	Italy/Ghana	\$56,255.06	24	UAE/Bahrain	\$11,185.00
6	Germany, UK, Ireland	\$51,048.98	25	Central America	\$10,563.00
7	UK	\$40,726.56	26	Jordan, Afghanistan, Qatar	\$9,106.48
8	Denmark, Hungary, Luxembourg	\$39,219.00	27	Nicaragua, El Salvador	\$8,905.52
9	India, Tomor-Leste, Indonesia, UK	\$38,868.97	28	Lebanon	\$5,811.92
10	Argentina, Brazil, Colombia	\$27,568.80	29	Guam, Saipan	\$5,794.41
11	Spain	\$27,392.87	30	Italy/Germany	\$4,944.40
12	Libya, Ethiopia, Kenya, Gambia	\$24,640.77	31	Poland, Hungary, Belgium, Ukraine	\$4,110.07
13	Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Moldova	\$24,197.91	32	Luxembourg, Belgium	\$3,896.72
14	Belgium	\$23,735.68	33	Portugal	\$2,791.69
15	Mexico	\$20,967.85	34	Mexico, Central America	\$2,284.33
16	Slovakia	\$20,727.42	35	Montenegro, Croatia, Italy	\$2,110.84
17	Argentina, Brazil	\$19,396.89	36	Haiti	\$2,037.43
18	Japan	\$18,400.27	37	Switzerland	\$322.00
19	Singapore	\$17,025.00		Grand Total	\$4,285,364.90

*Includes per diem, food, lodging, transportation, and other purposes as published in the Congressional Record as of 1/20/2020

Source: http://clerk.house.gov/public_disc/foreign/index.aspx

NOTABLE EXAMPLES:

- **AUG 6 - 14, 2019:** Rep. Ed Perlmutter (D-CO) spent \$23,000 during a one week trip to Australia.
- **JUL 27 - AUG 5, 2019:** Rep. Frank Pallone (D-NJ) spent \$75,000 during an eleven day trip to Italy, Morocco and France.
- **AUG 23 - 30, 2019:** Rep. Richard Hudson (R-NC) spent \$14,357 in transportation costs to Germany, Niger, Nigeria, Mali, and France during a one week trip.
- **AUG 14 - 21, 2019:** Three Appropriations Committee staffers flew to Mozambique and Malawi on a seven day trip at an airfare/transportation cost of \$54,600, or \$18,177 per person.
- **AUG 11 - 16, 2019:** Five Armed Services Committee staffers flew to Japan and Australia on a five day trip at an airfare/transportation cost of \$103,493, or \$20,698 per person.

RESPONSE TO OUR COMMENT REQUEST

“All travel was preapproved and booked through the Combined Airlines Ticket Offices which handles Congressional travel.”
Rep. Hudson spokesperson

 [READ ENTIRE RESPONSE](#)

OFFICE ALLOTMENT

U.S. HOUSE

Members' Representational Allowance (MRA): Available to support representatives in their official and representational duties. With an average MRA of \$1.3 million during a two-year term of office, taxpayers will provide \$2.6 million per member.

MRA IS CALCULATED BASED ON 3 COMPONENTS

1 Personnel
This is the same (\$944,671 for each member as of 2017).

2 Official office expense
Varies based on distance between member's district and Washington, D.C., and the cost of rental space in the member's district based on General Services Administration numbers.

3 Official mail
Varies based on the number of nonbusiness addresses in the district.

FURTHER RESTRICTIONS

MRA can be used for no more than 18 permanent employees, with 4 additional employees allowed falling into one of the following categories:

- Part-time employees
- Shared employees
- Interns receiving pay
- Employees on leave without pay
- Temporary employees

HOUSE COMMITTEES AND MRA

- \$172,500 for up to three staff members (2 majority and 1 minority)
- \$170,696 for up to nine staff members (6 majority and 3 minority)
- \$168,411 maximum for other staff

AMONGST OUR FINDINGS

MRA official use: Staff, travel, mail, office equipment, district office rental, stationery, and other office supplies.

MRA RESTRICTIONS:

- Defraying any personal or campaign-related expenses
- Using campaign funds or committee funds to pay for expenses related to official representational duties (except where authorized by the Committee on Ethics)
- Using an unofficial office account
- Accepting funds or assistance from a private source for an official activity
- Using personal funds to pay for official mail



Sources

[Congressional Research Service – Congressional Salaries and Allowances: In Brief, 4/11/2018](#)
[House.gov – Statement of Disbursements](#)

U.S. SENATE

Senators' Official Personnel and Office Expense Account ([SOPOEA](#)) – available to assist senators in their official and representational duties. In FY2018, SOPOEA ranged from \$3,192,760 to \$5,052,317 with an average allowance of \$3,467,971.



Therefore, during a six-year Senate term, taxpayers provide up to \$30.6 million to staff and fully operate a senator's office.

SOPOEA IS CALCULATED BASED ON THREE COMPONENTS

1

Administrative and clerical assistance allowance:

Varies by state population. Preliminary FY2018 numbers show allowance varies from \$2,587,374 for a senator representing a state with a population under five million to \$4,112,084 for a senator representing a state with a population of 28 million or more.

2

Legislative assistance allowance

This is the same for all senators, as of FY2018 it was \$482,958.

3

Official office expense allowance: Varies based on distance between the senator's home state and Washington, D.C., the home state population, and the official mail allocation. The FY2018 range was \$122,428 to \$456,275.

AMONGST OUR FINDINGS

Official use (SOPOEA): staff, travel, mail, office equipment, district office rental, stationery, and other office supplies.

SOPOEA restrictions:

- Defraying any personal or campaign-related expenses
- Using campaign funds or committee funds to pay for expenses related to official representational duties (except where authorized by the Committee on Ethics)
- Using an unofficial office account
- Accepting funds or assistance from a private source for an official activity
- Using personal funds to pay for official mail
- Mass mailings are limited to \$50,000 per fiscal year
- Maximum annual salary for committee employees is \$171,315
- Salary for a Senate employee may not exceed \$169,459 each year

SENATORS HAVE A FEW MORE PERKS BEYOND THAT OF REPRESENTATIVES:

Office space in states

- Each senator is authorized a home state office space in federal buildings. If that is not available, other office space may be secured. Office costs cannot exceed the highest rate per square foot charged by the General Services Administration.
- Aggregate square footage of office space that can be secured for a senator ranges from 5,000 square feet, if the population of the state is less than 3 million, to 8,200 square feet, if the state's population is 17 million or more.
- Each senator is allowed to lease one mobile office for use only in the state they represent.

Furniture and Furnishings

- There is an approved list of authorized furniture and furnishings.
- Furniture and furnishings are supplied and maintained by the Architect of the Capitol (Senate office buildings) and the Senate Sergeant at Arms (offices in the Capitol). Additional furnishings can be purchased through the Senate stationery store.
- Senators receive \$40,000 for state office furniture and furnishings for one or more offices – provided the aggregate square footage does not exceed 5,000 square feet with base authorization increased by \$1,000 for each authorized additional incremental increase in office space of 200 square feet.

Sources

Congressional Research Service – Congressional Salaries and Allowances: In Brief, 4/11/2018
U.S. Senate, Report of the Secretary of the Senate

APPENDIX

FAST FACTS ABOUT CONGRESS

Congress is the legislative branch of the United States federal government that works concurrently with the executive branch (President) and the judicial branch (Supreme Court). Congress is tasked with representing the American people and making the laws.

CONGRESS HAS 535 VOTING MEMBERS

435 REPRESENTATIVES

100 SENATORS

CONGRESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

As delineated by Article I of the Constitution

- ★ Make laws
- ★ Declare war
- ★ Raise and provide public money and oversee its proper expenditure
- ★ Impeach and try federal officers
Approve presidential appointments
- ★ Approve treaties negotiated by the executive branch
- ★ Oversight and investigations

HOUSE REQUIREMENTS

Must be 25 years of age or older

Must be a citizen for 7 years or more

Must be a resident of the state represented at the time of the election

SENATE REQUIREMENTS

Must be 30 years of age or older

Must be a citizen for 9 years or more

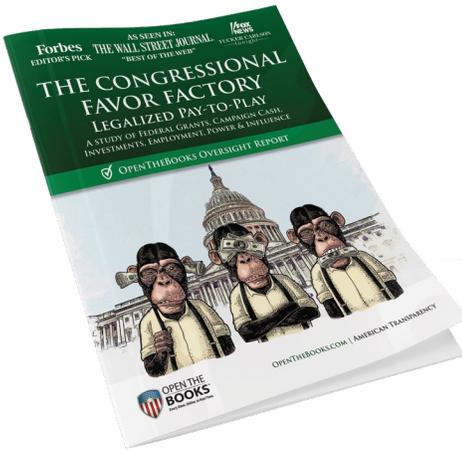
Must be a resident of the state represented at the time of the election

FAST FACTS ABOUT CONGRESS

- ★ Representatives in the U.S. House serve two-year terms on behalf of a specific district in their state comprised of approximately 747,000 residents. Therefore, each state has varying numbers of representatives depending on its census. Additionally, there are six non-voting members of the House representing different U.S. territories (Puerto Rico, American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands) and the District of Columbia.
- ★ U.S. senators serve six-year terms representing an entire state. Each of the 50 states elect two senators. Terms are staggered so that only one-third stand for re-election at any given time. The Senate President is the Vice President of the United States.
- ★ Election to Congress is rare. Since the [first](#) Congress was convened, only 12,348 individuals have served as representatives, senators, or both. There have been 10,363 citizens elected to the U.S. House and 1,307 citizens elected to the U.S. Senate. Only 677 citizens have served in both chambers. (Since our founding, roughly [545 million people](#) have lived in America and the population of the country is currently 330 million.)
- ★ The [youngest person ever elected](#) to the U.S. House was William Charles Cole Clairborne of Tennessee in 1797. Clairborne was just 22 years old and younger than the constitutional age requirement of 25 years. Two years later, in 1799, Clairborne was re-elected to Congress at age 24. In both instances, the House chose to seat him.
- ★ The [youngest person ever elected](#) to the U.S. Senate was John Henry Eaton of Tennessee. He was elected to the Senate in 1818 at age 28, and he was sworn in before anyone asked about his age. Since 1935, the youngest U.S. senator was Joseph R. Biden, Jr., from Delaware – age 30, 1 month, and 14 days – who took the oath of office in 1973.
- ★ The [longest-serving member](#) of the U.S. House was John Dingell, Jr., of Michigan. Representative Dingell served 59 years in the House of Representatives (1955-2015). Between John Dingell, Sr. (father), John Dingell, Jr., and Debbie Dingell (wife), a member of the Dingell family has held the MI-12 congressional seat for 86-years.
- ★ The [longest-serving member](#) of the U.S. Senate was Robert Byrd of West Virginia. Senator Byrd served 51 years (1959-2010).

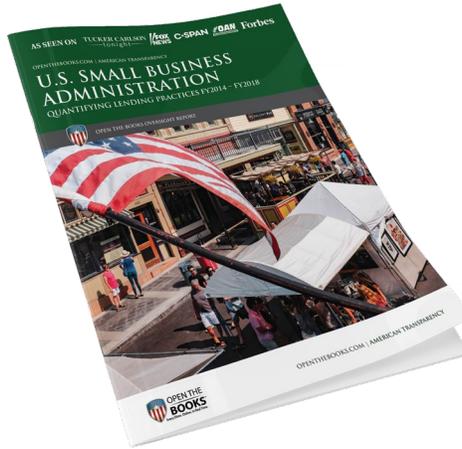


PREVIOUS OVERSIGHT



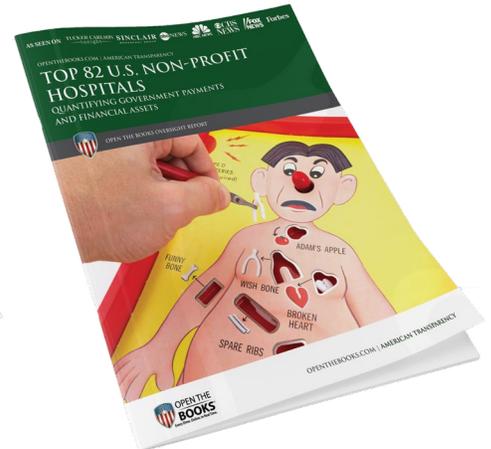
THE CONGRESSIONAL FAVOR FACTORY: LEGALIZED PAY-TO-PLAY

 [VIEW REPORT](#)



U.S. SMALL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION: QUANTIFYING LENDING PRACTICES FY2014 - FY2018

 [VIEW REPORT](#)



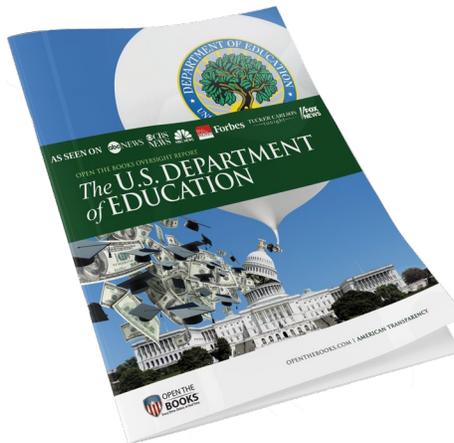
TOP 82 U.S. NON-PROFIT HOSPITALS: QUANTIFYING GOVERNMENT PAYMENTS AND FINANCIAL ASSETS

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FEDERAL FUNDING OF FORTUNE 100 COMPANIES

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THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S USE-IT-OR-LOSE-IT SPENDING SPREE

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OUR WORKS HAVE BEEN FEATURED ON:



and many others.

In 2016...

We exposed the \$20 million luxury-art procurement program at the Department of Veterans Affairs, which forced a public apology from the V.A. Secretary and the adoption of new rules to stop the abuse. Exposed the militarization of traditional regulatory agencies of the federal government at *The Wall Street Journal* and led to congressional oversight hearings, briefings, and legislation (2016). Our Ivy League, Inc. report led to reforms implemented in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017.

In 2018...

Our open letter to President Donald Trump published in *The Wall Street Journal* and *USA Today* urged a “transparency revolution” and “war on waste.” Our letters helped galvanize the President’s order to cut 5% from the agencies – which was later codified in the president’s FY2020 budget to Congress.

Our founder, Adam Andrzejewski, has addressed Harvard Law School, Georgetown Law School, and the Columbia School of Journalism regarding public-sector forensic auditing techniques and big data journalism. Andrzejewski is a Senior Policy Contributor at *Forbes* with 5.3 million page views on 114 published investigations.

RECENT INVESTIGATIONS INCLUDE:

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IN RECOGNITION OF OUR TEAM:

Adam Andrzejewski, Chief Executive Officer and founder, authored this report.

Matthew Tyrmand, Deputy Director at Large, disseminated this report to national media.

Craig Mijares, Chief Operating Officer, assembled and organized datasets.

Madalen Strumpf, Oversight Manager, spearheaded our data investigation and oversight teams.

Sejzelle Erastus-Obilo, Graphic Designer & Media Associate, designed the report.

Bryan Berky, research contractor, led the investigation on foreign travel, impeachment costs, committee costs, and quorum.

Jordan Sillars helped edit this report.

This report quantifies federal transactions compiled by the Congress. To the extent the government makes mistakes in reporting inaccurate or incomplete data, our report will reflect these same mistakes. 



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OVERSIGHT REPORT



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