

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Financial Crisis: At \$85,000 A Year, USVI Senators Earn More Than Almost All State Senators In U.S.

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As the territory's financial crisis takes hold, with the Government of the Virgin Islands in a hole of \$110 million that it can no longer borrow its way out of, The Consortium has been looking at the compensation and structure of the territory's legislature, and how much its members get paid.

[For his part, Governor Kenneth Mapp says the high salaries of local officials is not on his priority list.](#)

Notwithstanding the governor's nonchalance, The Consortium has compared the salaries of Virgin Islands senators to that of their counterparts on the U.S. mainland, and

found not only a variety of different structures -- many of which aim to greatly benefit the states' people -- but also that senators in the U.S. Virgin Islands receive higher compensation than all but one state: California, and matches Pennsylvania with just over \$85,000 annually.

According to Senate President Myron Jackson, the 32nd Legislature's 2017 budget is \$19 million. Out of that amount, \$11,970,000 goes directly to senators' offices annually, with the Senate president's office, followed by the At-Large seat, receiving the most dollars.

Senators also receive per diem when on overnight, inter-island legislative duty.

The 13 regular senators receive \$380,000 annually (or \$760,000 every two years) each for their offices, an amount that includes salaries of senators and employees, as well as travel and supplies, according to Mr. Jackson. The combined total for regular senators on an annual basis totals \$9,880,000. The At-Large seat receives an annual budget of \$475,000 (\$950,000 every two years), while the Senate president receives an annual appropriation from the \$19 million budget of \$570,000, or \$1,140,000 every two years.

By contrast, the state legislatures have a multitude of different setups. Take for example Alabama. Alabama legislators receive a taxable compensation equal to the Alabama median annual household income, as ascertained and adjusted yearly by the State Personnel Board. The State Personnel Board met on Oct. 22, 2014, and set the median annual household income amount at \$42,849.00.

Also, Alabama Legislators no longer receive a set per diem rate while in session. Legislators are reimbursed for in-state travel expenses which include mileage and per diem in accordance with rates and procedures applicable to state employees. All out of district reimbursable travel must be for official business and in the interests of the state or in the performance of official duties, as approved by the applicable Presiding Officer.

Another interesting setup is Texas. The Texas Legislature is bicameral, meaning it has two branches: the Senate and House of Representatives. There are 31 members of the Senate, representing single-member districts across the U.S. state of Texas, with populations of approximately 806,000 per constituency, based on the 2010 U.S. Census. Senators in Texas earn \$7,200/year, with a per diem of \$190 a day. The Texas Legislature, operating under the biennial system, convenes its regular sessions at noon on the second Tuesday in January of odd-numbered years. The maximum duration of a regular session is 140 days. If the Legislature meets for all 140 of regular session days, members who attend all sessions earn an additional \$26,600 through per diem.

The highest paid state lawmakers are those who [serve in California](#), with an annual salary of \$97,197. They also make \$168 per diem for each day they're in session.

To be fair, there are other levels of government in place on the mainland that further delegates responsibilities of government. They include councilmen elected through the districting system as one example. And many of the U.S. senators work on a part-time basis.

Below, the full list of U.S. state legislatures and their salaries, courtesy the National Conference of State Legislatures (2016).

[Read the original document](#)

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