

Happy New Year!! On Nov. 8, we will elect a new President, Vice President, 1 Senator (incumbent Senator Martin Heinrich) and all 3 members of the House of Representatives. What business will get done – VERY LITTLE! According to the House of Representative Calendar they will only be in session a whopping total of 75 days. The longest recess will be 16 July to 5 September. Hopefully this will allow time for many members to make appointments with your Senators and Representative, and possibly having them speak at a meeting or special function.

It is expected that Republicans will probably hold onto their majority in the House of Representatives. On the other hand, the Senate is up for grabs. Democrats need five seats to retake control of the chamber and five Republicans are facing tough re-elections in states President Obama won in 2012: Wisconsin, Illinois, Ohio, New Hampshire and Pennsylvania. The possibility of a 50/50 split remains, which will give control to the party that wins the White House, because the vice president could cast a tiebreaking vote in the Senate.

As we approach this hectic political time I was asked by a member what salary info is available on our legislators. This is what led me to do some research to provide all our members.

## REPRESENTATIVES

**Salaries:** As of December 2014, the annual salary of each Representative is [\\$174,000](#). A [cost-of-living-adjustment](#) (COLA) increase takes effect annually unless Congress votes to not accept it. Congress sets members' salaries; however, the [Twenty-seventh Amendment to the United States Constitution](#) prohibits a change in salary (but not COLA)<sup>1</sup> from taking effect until after the next election of the whole House. Representatives are eligible for retirement benefits after serving for five years. Outside pay is limited to 15% of congressional pay, and certain types of income involving a fiduciary responsibility or personal endorsement are prohibited.

**Pension:** All members of Congress are automatically (without the option of withdrawal) enrolled in the [Federal Employees Retirement System](#), a pension system also used for [federal civil servants](#). They become eligible to receive benefits after five years of service (two and one-half terms in the House). The FERS is composed of three elements:

1. [Social Security](#)
2. The FERS basic annuity, a monthly pension plan based on the number of years of service and the average of the three highest years of basic pay
3. The [Thrift Savings Plan](#), a [401\(k\)](#)-like [defined contribution plan](#) for retirement account into which participants can deposit up to a maximum of \$17,000 in 2012. Their employing agency [matches employee contributions](#) up to 5% of pay.

Members of Congress may retire with full benefits at age 62 after five years of service, at age 50 after twenty years of service, and at any age after twenty-five years of service. They may retire with reduced benefits at ages 55 to 59 after five years of service, and age 50 after 20 years of service. Depending on birth year, they may receive a reduced pension after ten years of service if they are between 55 years and 57 years of age.

**Tax deduction:** Members of Congress are permitted to deduct up to \$3,000 of living expenses per year incurred while living away from their district or home state.<sup>[27]</sup>

**Health benefits:** Prior to 2014, members of Congress and their staff had access to essentially the same health benefits as federal civil servants; they could voluntarily enroll in the [Federal Employees Health Benefits Program](#) (FEHBP), an employer-sponsored health insurance program, and were eligible to participate in other programs, such as the [Federal Flexible Spending Account Program](#) (FSAFEDS).

However, Section 1312(d)(3)(D) of the [Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act](#) (ACA) provided that the only health plans that the federal government can make available to members of Congress and certain congressional staff are those created under the ACA or offered through a [health care exchange](#). The [Office of Personnel Management](#) promulgated a final rule to comply with Section 1312(d)(3)(D). Under the rule, effective January 1, 2014, members and designated staff are no longer able to purchase FEHBP plans as active employees. However, if members enroll in a health plan offered through a Small Business Health Options Program (SHOP) exchange, they remain eligible for an employer contribution toward coverage, and members and designated staff who are eligible for retirement may enroll in a FEHBP plan upon retirement.

The ACA and the final rule do not affect members' or staffers' eligibility for [Medicare](#) benefits. The ACA and the final rule also do not affect members' and staffers' eligibility for other health benefits related to federal employment, so current members and staff are eligible to participate in FSAFEDS (which has three options within the program), the [Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program](#), and the [Federal Long Term Care Insurance Program](#).

There is an [Office of the Attending Physician](#) at the U.S. Capitol, which current members may seek health care from for an annual fee. The attending physician provides routine exams, consultations, and certain diagnostics, and may write prescriptions (although it does not dispense them). The office does not provide vision or dental care.

Current members (but not their dependents, and not former members) may also receive medical and emergency dental care at military treatment facilities. There is no charge for outpatient care if it is provided in the [National Capital Region](#), but members are billed at full reimbursement rates (set by the Department of Defense) for inpatient care. (Outside the National Capital Region, charges are at full reimbursement rates for both inpatient and outpatient care).

**Personnel, mail and office expenses:** House members are eligible for a Member's Representational Allowance (MRA) to support them in their official and representational duties to their district. The MRA is calculated based on three components: one for personnel, one for official office expenses and one for official or franked mail. The personnel allowance is the same for all members; the office and mail allowances vary based on the members' district's distance from Washington, D.C., the cost of office space in the member's district, and the number of non-business addresses in their district. These three components are used to calculate a single MRA that can fund any expense—even though each component is calculated individually, the franking allowance can be used to pay for personnel expenses if the member so chooses. In 2011 this allowance averaged \$1.4 million per member, and ranged from \$1.35 to \$1.67 million.

The Personnel allowance was \$944,671 per member in 2010. Each member may employ no more than 18 permanent employees. Members' employees' salary is capped at \$168,411 as of 2009.

**Travel allowance:** Each member-elect and one staffer can be paid for one round trip between their home in their congressional district and Washington, D.C. for organization caucuses

## SENATORS

**Salary and benefits: The annual [salary](#) of each senator, since 2009, is \$174,000; the president pro tempore and party leaders receive \$193,400. In June 2003, at least 40 of the then-senators were millionaires.**

Along with earning salaries, senators receive retirement and health benefits that are identical to other federal employees, and are fully [vested](#) after five years of service. Senators are covered by the [Federal Employees Retirement System](#) (FERS) or [Civil Service Retirement System](#) (CSRS). As it is for federal employees, congressional retirement is funded through taxes and the participants' contributions. Under FERS, senators contribute 1.3% of their salary into the FERS retirement plan and pay 6.2% of their salary in Social Security taxes. The amount of a senator's pension depends on the years of service and the average of the highest 3 years of their salary. The starting amount of a senator's retirement annuity may not exceed 80% of their final salary. In 2006, the average annual pension for retired senators and representatives under CSRS was \$60,972, while those who retired under FERS, or in combination with CSRS, was \$35,952.

The Majority and Minority Leaders salary is \$193,400, plus the other benefits above.

The Speaker of the House salary is \$223,500, plus the other benefits listed above.

The Vice President salary is \$230,700.

The President salary is \$400,000. Plus \$50,000 non-taxable expense allowance to assist in defraying expenses relating to or resulting from the discharge of his official duties. Plus \$10,000 taxable expense allowance. Under the Former Presidents Act, each former president is [paid a lifetime, taxable pension](#) that is equal to the annual rate of basic pay for the head of an executive federal department -- \$201,700 in 2015.

Each former president and vice president may also take advantage of funds allocated by Congress to help facilitate their transition to private life. These funds are used to provide suitable office space, staff compensation, communications services, and printing and postage associated with the transition.

As an example, Congress authorized a total of \$1.5 million for the transition expenses of outgoing president George H.W. Bush and Vice President Dan Quayle.

The Secret Service provides lifetime protection for former presidents who entered office before January 1, 1997, and for their spouses. Surviving spouses of former presidents receive protection until remarriage.

Former Presidents and their spouses, widows, and minor children are entitled to treatment in military hospitals. Health care costs are billed to the individual at a rate established by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Former Presidents and their dependents may also enroll in private health plans at their own expense.