

## Congressional Compensation

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The problem of Congressional Salaries has been around since the formation of the Republic. In fact one of the Amendments in the original Bill of Rights that was rejected by that early Congress was that Congress was not to be allowed to raise its own salary. That was in 1789. The situation had persisted and the 27<sup>th</sup> Amendment was finally adopted in 1991, using language nearly identical to that proposed 202 years earlier. Unfortunately, it hasn't helped. Congress has a reelection rate that is typically greater than 90%, so adopting a pay raise that isn't effective until after the next election isn't much of a deterrent.

In 2014, my writing partner, Sebastian Roberts, noticed something that he thought might give us the leverage we need to rein in the pay scale. Sebastian noticed that the Constitution states that compensation for serving in Congress shall be as "ascertained by law and paid out of the Treasury of the United States." Sebastian's proposal was philosophically based and simple, if not simple to achieve. He proposed in his book, *Dragonfly*, that one word be added to the phrase: State. The new phrase would read, "...ascertained by *State* law and paid out of the Treasury of the United States."

Philosophically, the Representative or Senator is the employee of the state. While it is convenient to write paychecks from the treasury, philosophically, it makes more sense to have the pay of United States Senators and Representatives set by the legislature of each individual state. There is no requirement, and there ought to be no expectation, that all members of Congress should receive the same pay.

I advised Sebastian that, while his suggestion might have some impact, many, if not most, state legislators dream of being in Washington themselves one day, and would be tempted to adopt pay raises in exchange for endorsements when they became candidates.

The topic came up again in a discussion which included the fact that most of our members of Congress are millionaires. The question was, "Are these candidates motivated to run for office by patriotism or by the pursuit of fortune?" The answer was obvious, but, in that moment, an alternative to Sebastian's suggestion popped to the surface.

Now, forgive the digression, but I need to make certain that everyone is cognizant of some terms: Average, Median, and Mode. These are statistical terms which most people have heard but not as many can differentiate. Average is the most common and

everyone knows that you simply add up all the numbers and divide by the number of numbers you added.  $2+2+3+3+3+3+12+13+15+19+20+21+27=143$  : Divide by 13; the average is 11. The Median is simply the number in the middle of the string, no matter what it is. So, the median in the example is 12. The Mode is the most commonly occurring number, which in this string is 3.

Now that we've reviewed, we can get back to the new proposal. Instead of having the state legislature set the salary, what would happen if we adopted state and federal amendments to our constitution that set the salaries of elected officials to equal to the Mode (most common level) of income earned by those whom they represented? Referring back to that string of numbers, our congressmen right now are near the values of 19 or 20 in the analogy, but with a salary equal to the mode, they would be at 3: about \$40,000 annually.

The first and most obvious change would be that people would stop running for office in order to make a lot of money. That would open the door for people who actually care about the people residing in the district. Those who were elected would more easily understand the difficulties of their constituents because they would be more likely to be in the same income bracket as the largest number of them.

This is perhaps not a perfect plan, but it just might help to resurrect that rarest of all public official, the Statesman.