

What Would You Do With More Than \$2 Million for Staffing?

Written by Todd McGreevy
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What would you be able to accomplish with a staffing budget of more than \$2 million? That is the first thing I asked myself when I researched the U.S. Senate staffing budgets at [Legistorm.com](#)

Senator Dick Durbin is spending nearly \$3 million per year in staff salaries. Senator Chuck Grassley has more than \$2.6 million and is employing more than 50 people. Members of Congress, especially new ones, must have to pay their dues in D.C., as Representative Bobby Schilling only had \$695,000 to work with in Fiscal Year 2011 while Representative Bruce Braley had more than \$1 million to employ his 20 staffers.

The standard operating procedure seems to be to pay chiefs of staff between \$160,000 and \$170,000 annually. These figures are not bandied about when the incumbents or challengers are vying for your votes every two and six years. Consider that in 2002, members of Congress were paid \$150,000, and that today they are paid \$174,000 ([RCReader.com/y/congress](#)). That's a 16-percent raise over 10 years. Has your job enjoyed such raises over that same time period? And when the top staffer is paid nearly as much as the elected "official," one begins to understand that a person vying for these elected positions is vying for an institution, an enterprise, a heavily funded platform from which to dole out privileges and influence. No wonder so much money is spent on campaign races for a job that pays less than \$200,000. When one has a budget of nearly \$3 million at one's disposal for staffing alone, one can accomplish quite a bit.

Keep in mind that these figures do not include the annual costs of maintaining multiple offices, supplies, communications, travel, meals, and so on. What on Earth could these legislators possibly need such lavish staffing budgets for? Well, let's take a look at the busy meeting schedule of just one of the career politicians in the Iowa/Illinois congressional delegation. Here is the publicized list of interest groups Grassley was meeting with last week: Iowa Dietetic

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Association, the Workers Injury Law & Advocacy Group, the Iowa Association of Nurse Anesthetists, ONE, the Arthritis Foundation, Goodwill Industries, the National Council of Investigation & Security Services, the Military Officers Association of America, the Iowa Restaurant Association, the Material Advantage Student Program, the Iowa State Bar Association, the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, the Institute of Real Estate Management, the American Heart Association, the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, the National Registry of Rehabilitation Technology Suppliers, and the National Coalition for Assistive & Rehab Technology. And here is whom he is meeting this week: Iowa Library Association, Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation, Iowa Leading Age, the Iowa Finance Authority, student fraternity and sorority leaders, the International Dairy Foods Association, the Iowa Department of Transportation, the National Structured Settlements Trade Association, the Independent Insurance Agents of Iowa, the Plumbing, Heating, & Cooling Contractors of Iowa, and the Iowa Orthopaedic Society.

To the credit of Grassley's staff, at least they issue a notification of the interest groups he is meeting with, and it's a "damned if you do, damned if you don't" world, as any politician would be chastised for not meeting with constituents from his or her own state. But what would be really interesting is to see the list of all the meetings each member of our congressional delegation has, especially the ones with national and international interest groups and corporations. The point of this exercise is to bring to bear that of course these politicians need millions of dollars in staffing budgets! How else would they be able to keep such packed schedules of meetings with interest group after interest group and still find time to actually attend to the duties enumerated in the Constitution they swore an oath to uphold? Perhaps more important is that staffers hold the key to the kingdom in that they do most of the scheduling. They are the congressmen's gatekeepers in every sense of the word.

And consider that when in the private sector, someone getting paid a salary of more than \$160,000 per year would typically be responsible for producing something. What is it that these staffers are producing, other than the infrastructure required to keep special interests and constituents well-attended-to in their quest to get something from the government? When one takes into consideration that the government produces nothing without first taking from taxpayers, the activity of government officials and staffers begins to look like a self-perpetuating scheme rather than a prudent body of people charged with enforcing a very limited and enumerated set of duties.

This issue features [a piece compiled by Managing Editor Jeff Ignatius titled "By the Numbers: Getting to Know Your Members of Congress."](#)

When one takes into view the totality of what these numbers represent, it brings into sharp focus the caste system that has been flourishing within our society. That caste system is one of the government sector, the political class and its bureaucracy.

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I encourage you to take advantage of the free research tools available at the Web sites sourced in the article: GovTrack.us , OpenSecrets.org , VoteSmart.org , and Legistorm.com . For instance, at Legistorm.com one can view the financial-disclosure forms of every congressional staff member and discover things such as one lead staffer who has two rental homes in Washington, D.C., each valued between \$500,000 and \$2 million. For a small fee, one can dive even deeper to research family and lobbying connections of staffers, such as a legislative district director whose wife used to work for the Federal Reserve. Then there is the commonly referred to, but little discussed, revolving door, where congressmen and staffers come from industry and influence legislation, or move from government to industry to do the same – all with an agenda of improving their economic/power base. These webs that are woven have little, if anything, to do with upholding or enforcing the Bill of Rights – the forgotten mandate these politicians swore an oath to uphold.

These observations are not smoking guns unto themselves. But they help to understand the culture of political entitlement and inertia, and the unwillingness to accomplish any substantive change to the status quo. Instead of efficient, effective government, Washington, D.C., and politics in general have devolved into a cesspool of corruption that benefits only those who pay to play. At Legistorm.com, one can look up the stocks and investments that congressional staffers own and take that into consideration when reviewing the legislative committees served on by the House or Senate member they work for. Thankfully, with the digital age, we have fewer and fewer excuses for being uninformed, and no excuses for not getting involved in holding your elected so-called leaders accountable.