



## Lee Zurik Investigation: A deeper look into legislative staff salaries

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North Shore State Representative John Schroder, R-Covington, did more than question the numbers we showed him. He criticized the Legislature for what he thinks is allowing the number of employees and the salaries paid to them get out of hand.

“I don't think it's good. If I'm a taxpayer at home, I'd question it,” Schroder said. “If you go down the list and go down those salaries you shown me. I'm in the wrong business.”

Last year alone, four employees of the House and Senate made over \$200,000 dollars.

*Jerry Guillot Senate Chief of Staff \$214,324.08*

*Glenn Koepp Secretary of the Senate \$201,890.55*

*Thomas Tyler Senate Deputy Chief of Staff \$200,814.17*

*Alfred Speer Clerk of the House \$204,429.59*

“You just can't have an unlimited ceiling on salaries and that looks what we're doing,” Schroder said.

But House Speaker Jim Tucker, R-Algiers, says all of the employees making more than six figures have more than 20 to 25 years of service.

Tucker also says it's difficult for the legislature to freeze salaries.

“In state government there is a rolling increase in years of service,” Tucker said. And for people who have been working for 20 to 25 years, that adds up.

The House has executive assistants making six figures. A secretary made close to it - \$95,368.08 last year. The Senate has a secretary that made \$93,822.96.

“They are quite impressive,” New Orleans State Representative J.P. Morrell said of the salary figures. “I wasn’t aware of most of them.”

But when you compare Louisiana to other states, it gets even more interesting.

Remember the highest paid employee of the Senate - Chief of Staff Jerry Guillot took home a total of \$214,000 last year.

Compare that to three other states who have salary information published online. Tennessee pays its highest Senate staffer \$147,000. Georgia’s highest paid employee came in at \$118,000. And Arkansas was at \$101,000.

“When you start comparing yourself to your peers you have to take the good with the bad,” Schroder said. “And obviously you got the bad out there.”

One of the reasons pay rates are so high is the amount of extra hour and overtime pay handed out.

Here’s some example from the Senate last year.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>2009 Base Salary</b>	<b>2009 XHR/OT</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Jerry Guillot</b>	Sen. Chief of Staff	\$191,745	\$22,574	\$214,324
<b>Thomas Tyler</b>	Sen. Dep. Chief of Staff	\$181,749	\$19,065	200,814
<b>Riley Boudreaux</b>	Chief Rev. Counsel	147,982	17,786	165,769

On the House side, they paid almost \$19,000 in overtime to a director and \$13,000 to executive counsel.

“I just don't think people getting paid six figures should be getting overtime pay,” Schroder said.

Tucker says everyone on the House side is eligible for overtime. “But their supervisors monitor that,” Tucker said.

Tucker said during Legislative Session some House staff work 60 or 70 hours a week. And he says the salaries are a necessity. It's one of the only ways they're able to hold on to valuable employees.

“In the private sector we do not compete well,” Tucker said. “Those people would make more than they do in the Legislature and we lose them in seven to ten years.”

Louisiana has more staffers making six figures than some other states:

*Louisiana 41 legislative staffers making six figures*

*Georgia 14 legislative staffers making six figures*

*Arkansas 12 legislative staffers making six figures*

*Tennessee 10 legislative staffers making six figures*

“They have expertise that you can't put a value on,” Senate President Joel Chaisson said. “I have no qualms of justifying the salaries these individuals make.”

But it's not just the salaries, it's also the number of state employees that has one government watchdog group stunned.

“Clearly Louisiana has grown the size of its legislative staff remarkably,” Jim Brandt of the Public Affairs Research Council said.

The legislature has both permanent staff and part-timers they just bring in for the session.

Since 1996 the National Conference of State Legislators says the size of Louisiana's permanent staff has grown 37%. It's session staff is up 48%.

“Keep in mind this is the same legislature that talks we have too many state employees,” Brandt said,”

Compare that to the rest of the country. While Louisiana has grown its staff the U.S. overall has contracted. Total legislative staff employees is down 1% overall in the country.

And again while Louisiana's session staff grew almost 50% all states combined reduced employees by 24%.

“Why ours has continued to grow while others have not it's hard to say,” Brandt said.

The House Speaker says staff size is down since he took over two years ago. The Senate

President says staff size is roughly the same as when he became President.

But while Louisiana has been battling a deficit, talking about streamlining government, has the legislature done its part?

“The answer is no,” according to Jim Brandt.

In the big picture Senate and House expenses make up a small percent of the state's budget.

“The legislative expense contributes one half of one percent of all state spending in Louisiana,” Tucker said.

But it's the message sent to constituents that has one lawmaker saying the legislature has to change.

“I think if we are going to hold government to a standard then we need to live in that standard ourselves,” Schroder said.