

http://lancasteronline.com/insider/how-much-do-members-of-congress-get-for-their-allowance/article_744d7b02-5dd4-11e7-b2ce-93bc5f9aa56a.html



How much do members of Congress get for their allowance?



SAM JANESCH | Staff Writer Jul 5, 2017

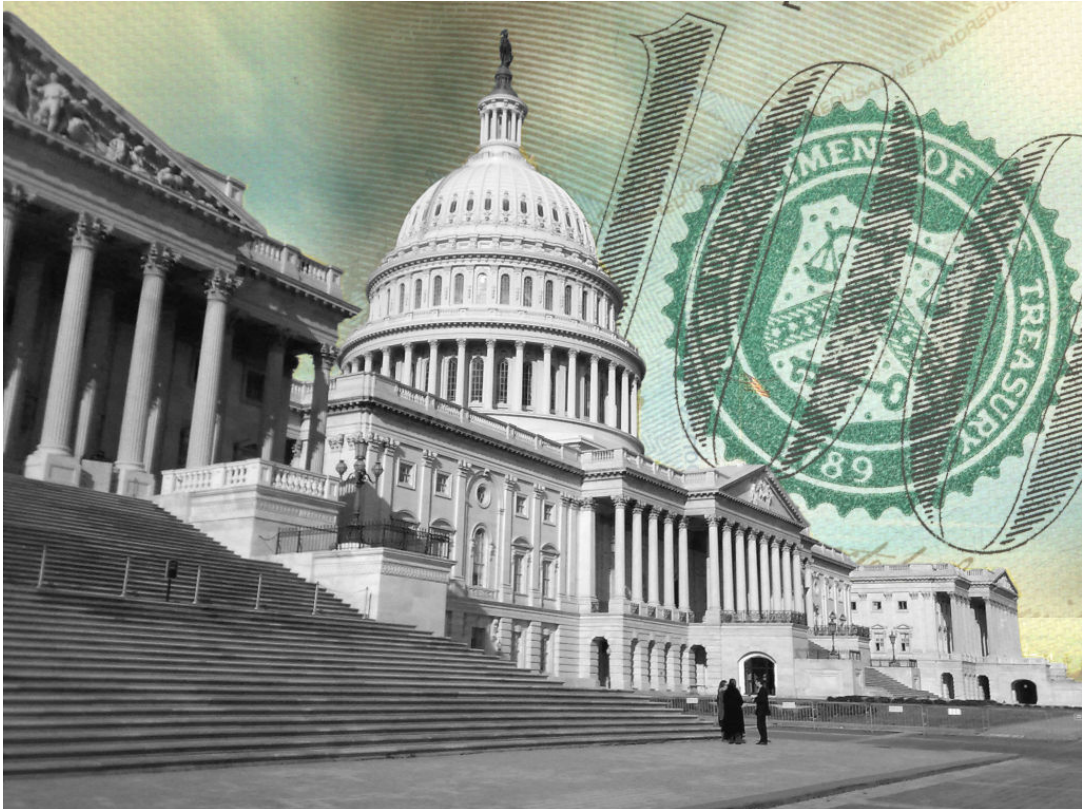


PHOTO ILLUSTRATION | Source art: Wikimedia Commons & Thinkstock

This story was originally published Saturday, July 1.

Candidates for public office have a habit of talking about how carefully they want to spend taxpayer money.

In federal campaigns — from Donald Trump’s presidential run to Lloyd Smucker’s congressional bid last year — they speak about “reining in Washington’s out-of-control spending.”

They pledge to do what they can to reduce the deficit and balance the budget.

But how much does it cost them to do that work once they get to Capitol Hill? How much taxpayer money do members of Congress give themselves to work for their constituents — in Washington and at home?

According to U.S. House records, it’s a costly endeavor.

More than half a billion dollars was allotted this year for the 435 members of the House of Representatives, according to an LNP review of the House records.

Every member is given an annual budget of up to \$1.8 million to use on his or her staff, office supplies, travel, communications with constituents, district office rents and more.

Kyle Kopko, a professor of political science at Elizabethtown College, said “it’s probably not a bad price, all things considered.”

“A lot of folks just assume members of Congress’ job is to go to D.C. and vote on bills and draft legislation,” Kopko said. “I don’t think they always consider the other things that members of Congress or their staff do.”

Allowance



\$1,255,010

Amount U.S. Rep. Lloyd Smucker gets this year for his Member’s Representational Allowance (MRA).



\$1,315,709

Average amount a member of Congress gets for their MRA, which is used for staff salary, district office rents, travel and more.

Each member's total Members Representational Allowance — or MRA — is set using a formula that deals with a number of factors, including distance from the Capitol and number of post office addresses.

Members do not have a say in how much he or she gets, other than voting on the overall funding for the chamber that is then split with the formula.

The 2017 MRA for U.S. Rep. Smucker, Lancaster County's newest congressman, is \$1,255,010, according to the House data.

That's the fourth-lowest out of all members listed and below the average of \$1,315,709.

U.S. Rep. Pat Meehan, a Republican who represents a portion of eastern Lancaster County, has an MRA of \$1,281,801.

Reports of expenses are made public every quarter. Funds designated to members of Congress that are not used by the end of the fiscal year are still available to the member for two additional fiscal years.

Spending

The way each lawmaker uses his or her MRA — and how much of it they actually use — varies considerably.

Smucker's allowance and subsequent spending were among the lowest in the entire House for the first quarter of this year, according to LNP's review of the latest available data.

The West Lampeter Township Republican spent a total of \$220,213 January through March, which was the 33rd smallest amount and \$40,000 below the average.

The largest chunk of all members' expenses are for staff salaries.

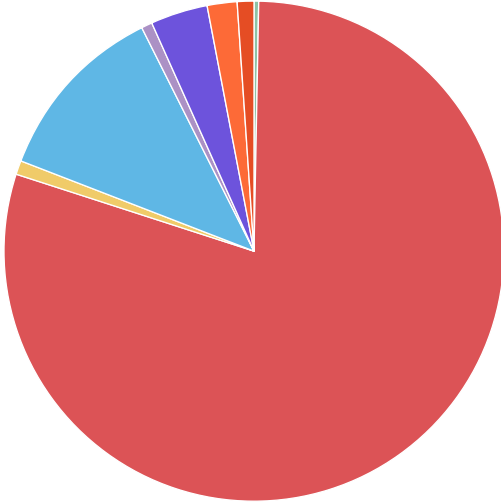
Between Smucker's D.C. and Lancaster offices, about \$175,000 of what he spent — or 80 percent — went to compensate the 13 full-time staff members and one shared staff member in the first three months of the year.

That doesn't include Smucker's salary, which is \$174,000 annually.

Meehan spent \$230,516 — including about \$17,000 more than Smucker on staff compensation. He was the 58th-lowest spender in the first quarter.

Rep. Smucker's expenses

- Rep. Lloyd Smucker's office spent \$220,212 in his first three months in Congress.
- The largest expense for all representatives is staff compensation, not including the representative's \$174,000 annual salary. Smucker has 13 full-time staffers and one who is part-time.
- Smucker's total allowance for the year is \$1.2 million.



FRANKED MAIL PERSONNEL COMPENSATION
TRAVEL RENT COMMUNICATION UTILITIES
PRINTING AND REPRODUCTION OTHER SERVICES
SUPPLIES AND MATERIALS EQUIPMENT

Source: U.S. House of Representatives Statement of Disbursements, Jan. 1, 2017 to March 31, 2017.

 Share

District rent

Smucker's second-largest expense was \$25,797 under the umbrella of rent, communications and utilities. That includes the monthly rent of \$4,167 for his new district office on South Duke Street in Lancaster city.

By comparison, that is more than Smucker's predecessor Rep. Joe Pitts spent on his Lancaster office, but still below the average of all other Pennsylvania congressmen, according to LNP's review.

Pitts, who had multiple district office locations, paid \$1,522 monthly rent for his office in the Lancaster County government building and \$2,000 monthly rent for his Kennett Square office in 2016.

A spokesman for Smucker's office, when asked what factors went into the decision to switch offices from where Pitts was in Lancaster, said the new office was chosen because of its location, functional space and affordability.

This year, the state's 18 congressmen have spent an average of \$4,338 per month on district office rents, which does not include some of the utilities and technology services needed for those offices.

Some, such as Smucker and Meehan, report paying rent for just one office. Others pay rent on as many as four locations.

Rep. Scott Perry, of York, pays the most, with \$6,650 in rent across three offices. Rep. Glenn Thompson, of Centre County, paid the lowest amount: \$2,269 for two locations.

What do they pay in rent?

Part of a representative's allowance is to pay for district offices back home. Some, such as **Reps. Smucker and Meehan**, pay rent on just one location. Some of Pennsylvania's other 16 congressmen pay rent on up to 4 offices.

Rent 1 Rent 2 Rent 3 Rent 4

Source: U.S. House of Representatives Statement of Disbursements, Jan. 1, 2017 to March 31, 2017.

 Share