In January, Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker signed SB 3531, allowing him to raise the pay of his cabinet and agency directors an extra 15 percent. Pritzker says the legislation was needed to compete with the private sector and draw more talented individuals into his new administration.

Can the same be said about elected officials? Do Midwestern states offer salaries that are competitive to the rest of the country?

Unsurprisingly, states with larger populations generally pay their elected officials — limited in this discussion to the “constitutional” officers (usually, but not always, positions such as governor, lieutenant governor, secretary of state, attorney general and treasurer) — higher than states with smaller populations.

According to the 2018 edition of The Council of State Governments’ The Book of the States, the Midwest’s most populous state, Illinois, has the fifth-highest-paid governor ($177,412) in the nation and the fourth-highest-paid secretary of state ($156,541). (Neither Pritzker nor his predecessor in office, Bruce Rauner, took the salary given to the governor).

There are also some surprises in the data. North Dakota, the region’s least populous state, has the highest-paid attorney general ($157,009, seventh-highest nationwide). Its secretary of state is the fourth-highest-paid in the region ($105,770), but only the 25th in the country. Only one other position in the region ranked in the top 10 nationally for pay — Illinois’ attorney general, at $156,541 (eighth among the 50 states).

Pay rates for elected officials are most often set by the state’s constitution or in statute. Some positions have salaries that automatically adjust in line with inflation, such as the governor of Kentucky, whose salary increased from $45,000 in 1979 to $153,970 in 2013, before being reduced in following years.

Under Minnesota law, the Legislature decides the governor’s salary; pay for other constitutional officers is then set at a percentage of that salary. For example, the attorney general receives 95 percent of the governor’s salary, the state auditor receives 85 percent, the secretary of state receives 75 percent, etc.

Looking beyond high-ranking elected officials to total state payrolls for all full-time employees (FTEs), the trend again closely follows state populations: Michigan, Illinois, and Ohio have the highest payrolls in the region at $795 million, $683 million and $671 million, respectively; Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota have the lowest payrolls at $128 million, $90 million, and $63 million, respectively.

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