The average annual salary for U.S. governors in 2013 is $133,348 and 21 governors earn more than that average, a new survey by The Council of State Governments reveals. Maine Gov. Paul LePage, with an annual salary of $70,000, earns the lowest salary, followed by Arkansas Gov. Mike Beebe, who earns $86,890 per year. Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Corbett of Pennsylvania has the highest gubernatorial salary--$187,256—but he has refused at least three of cost-of-living adjustments during his tenure, making his actual pay closer to $175,000. New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo's salary of $179,000 per year ranks second among governors' salaries.

According to the survey of governors' salaries, published in The Book of the States [2] 2013, governors in three states--Alabama, Florida and Tennessee--do not accept a paycheck or return their salaries to the state, while Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder returns all but $1 of his salary to the state. Several governors have taken voluntary salary reductions in recent years.

Governors in a handful of states--Idaho, Indiana, North Carolina, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, South Dakota and Tennessee--saw their salaries increase in 2013 over 2012 levels. The average salary increase for these eight governors was $4,115, or 3.2 percent.

Only once during the past 10 years has the average annual salary for governors decreased. In 2010, the average salary fell slightly, from $131,115 to $130,595, in large part because the salary for California's governor was reduced by 18 percent based on recommendations from the state's Citizens Compensation Commission. Prior to the reduction, the governor's salary was the highest in the country--$212,179. Florida and Hawaii also cut pay for their top executive branch official in 2010.

"While governors' salaries are one key item shared in The Book of the States, the other 49 administrative officials' salaries tracked over time provide an even more complete picture of state government changes and priorities through the years," said Audrey Wall, managing editor for The Book of the States.

Although a number of states reduced governor's salaries from 2003 to 2009, those reductions were offset by increases in other states, making the average annual change for governor's salaries a 2.8 percent increase over this period.

"Since the decrease that occurred in 2010, the average governor's salary has grown more slowly than in the previous decade, increasing less than 1 percent each year," said Jennifer Burnett, CSG's fiscal and economic policy analyst. "That is due, in large part, to the widespread salary freezes that halted cost-of-living adjustments for public employees, which have persisted since the recession. It's also politically tough to raise salaries for those in high-profile public sector positions when private sector wages remain stagnant."

The Council of State Governments has been collecting data on governor's salaries since 1937 [3]. For the first year data were collected, the average salary for a governor in the 48 states was $7,823. When adjusted for inflation, the average salary for a governor in 1937 becomes $126,575--just 5
percent shy of the average salary in 2013.

In 1937, the governor of New York collected the highest salary, earning $25,000 a year. That $25,000 salary in 2013 dollars would be worth $404,500—more than double what Gov. Cuomo earns today. In comparison, the governor of South Dakota earned just $3,000 in 1937, or $48,540 in today’s dollars—less than half of Gov. Dennis Daugaard’s current $100,972 salary.

"The bottom line of who gets what from state government will always be a factor in determining how states are performing for their citizens," Wall said. "The Book of the States provides many other markers covering the entire scope of state government services—from governor’s offices to emergency management, the number of schoolchildren to the number of prisoners on probation ... a wide range of data necessary to give a complete picture of state government at work."

Governor Salaries 2013

Excerpted from Table 4.3, The Governors: Compensation, Staff, Travel and Residence, The Book of the States 2013, The Council of State Governments

Notes*

- Alabama - Gov. Robert Bentley is not accepting his salary of $119,950 until the unemployment rate in Alabama drops.
- Florida - Gov. Rick Scott does not collect his salary.
- Kentucky - Reflects a voluntary 10 percent salary reduction by Gov. Steve Beshear.
- Michigan - Gov. Rick Snyder returns all but $1 of his salary.
- New York - Gov. Andrew Cuomo voluntarily reduced his salary by 5 percent.
- Pennsylvania - Gov. Tom Corbett has refused at least three of cost-of-living adjustments during his tenure, returning the increases to the state and making his actual pay closer $175,000.
- Tennessee - Gov. Bill Haslam returns his salary to the state. Tennessee statute mandates the governor and the chief justice of the Supreme Court receive the same salary.
- Vermont - Gov. Peter Shumlin has taken a voluntary 5 percent reduction in his annual salary set in statute.