The Council of State Governments has been collecting data on governors’ salaries for The Book of the States since 1937. The average governor’s salary has grown more slowly in recent years than in the past, with a number of states cutting their chief executive’s pay during and after the Great Recession.

Governors’ salaries in 2014 range from a low of $70,000 per year to a high of $187,818, with an average salary of $134,390.

- The two highest paid governors in 2014 are Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Corbett ($187,818 per year) and Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam ($181,980 per year); however, both come with caveats. New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo is the third highest paid governor, earning $179,000 per year.
  - Corbett has the highest gubernatorial salary—$187,818—but he has refused at least three cost-of-living adjustments during his tenure and 1.7 percent of his salary is being repaid as part of a statewide management pay freeze, making his actual pay closer to $175,000.
  - Haslam’s salary of $181,980 per year ranks second among governors’ salaries, but he returns 100 percent of his salary to the state of Tennessee.
- Governors in two states—Alabama and Tennessee—either do not accept a paycheck or return their salaries to the state, while Florida Gov. Rick Scott returns all but 12 cents to the state and Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder returns all but $1 to the state.
- Several governors have taken voluntary salary reductions in recent years. For example, Kentucky Gov. Steve Beshear’s $138,012 salary reflects a voluntary 10 percent reduction from 2013. New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo also voluntarily reduced his salary by 5 percent in 2013, and Vermont Gov. Peter Shumlin took a voluntary 3 percent reduction in his annual salary, which is set by statute.

Governors’ salaries have been cut in some states and increased in others during and since the recession.

- The average annual salary for governors grew by 0.8 percent from 2013 to 2014.
- Governors in 11 states saw their salaries increase in 2014 over 2013 levels. Hawaii Gov. Neil Abercrombie saw the largest year-over-year increase, when his salary increased by 23 percent (from $117,312 to $143,748), based on recommendations from the state’s Commission on Salaries. The median salary increase for these 11 governors was $3,624.
- The average annual salary for governors has decreased only once during the past 10 years. 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.
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 governors’ salaries a 2.8 percent increase over this period.

Since the 2010 decrease, the average governor’s salary has grown more slowly than in the previous decade, increasing less than 1 percent each year. That is due, in large part, to the widespread salary freezes that halted cost-of-living adjustments for public employees during and after the recession; those salary freezes have persisted in a number of states.

The average governor’s salary in 2014 is very close to what it was 77 years ago, when adjusted for inflation.

The average salary for a governor in the 48 states was $7,823 in 1937. When adjusted for inflation, the average salary for a governor in 1937 becomes $129,313—just 4 percent shy of the average salary in 2014.

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 $413,250—more than double what Cuomo earns today.

The governor of South Dakota earned the least of any governor in 1937—$3,000—which is equal to $49,590 in today’s dollars, or less than half of Gov. Dennis Daugaard’s current $104,002 salary.

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