

# Area legislators top spenders for '08 travel

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Five of the top 10 spenders for taxpayer-paid travel among state House members in 2008 are from the Anderson area, according to the state Comptroller General's Office. Two more from the area make the top 25 list.

In the Senate, Oconee County Senator Thomas Alexander was the top traveler, spending the most of any legislator in the House or Senate in fiscal year 2008: \$20,072.

Sen. Larry Martin of Pickens County ranked seventh. Anderson legislator Kevin Bryant was 16th and Abbeville County legislator William O'Dell was 18th.

Reps. Bill Sandifer of Oconee County, Phillip Owens of Pickens County and Dan Cooper of Anderson County are the top spenders from the House, ranking 1-3, respectively.

Rep. Bill Whitmire of Oconee County was ranked sixth, and Rep. Brian White of Anderson County was ranked eighth, according to records from the comptroller general's office.

Two other representatives from the Anderson area made the top-25 list: Rep. Don Bowen of Anderson County was ranked 16th in spending for travel and Rep. Michael W. Gambrell of Anderson County was ranked 25th.

Total travel for the 124 House members in fiscal year 2008 was \$1.1 million and \$509,147 for the 46 Senate members.

Sandifer and Alexander, in separate interviews, said the distance they must travel between Oconee County and Columbia for legislative meetings and the regular session is in part why their costs are higher.

Also, both are members of the state's Public Utility Review Committee which traveled to Portland, Ore., last year for the National

Association of Regulatory Commissioners Conference.

"That was probably the largest expense I had," Sandifer said.

Alexander, who is chairman of that state utility committee, said the conference dealt with energy regulation, renewable energy, generation of electricity and new federal regulations.

"I think it was very valuable as we look to set energy policy for our state," Alexander said.

Both expense reports showed plane fare, conference registration and hotel costs, although the specific reason was not immediately available from the comptroller general's office.

Alexander spent \$5,495 on in-state auto mileage, \$1,325 in out-of-state lodging, \$325 on airfare, \$790 on registration fees, \$105 on out-of-state meals, and got \$11,789 for his in-state subsistence allowance. He also received \$65 for out of state mileage, \$146 for "other" transportation costs, and \$33 for miscellaneous costs.

Sandifer was paid \$3,539 for in-state mileage, \$9,491 for in-state subsistence allowance, \$1,251 for out-of-state lodging, \$320 for airfare, \$178 for out-of-state meals, \$126 for out of state mileage, \$130 for "other" transportation costs, \$70 for miscellaneous costs, and \$720 for out-of-state registration fees.

Sandifer said he travels to some conferences at his own expense. One was the American Legislative Exchange Council conference. That conference was held in Chicago, according to an ALEC spokesman. Sandifer said he paid for the travel, but the state picked up the registration fee, which was in the \$300-range.

Also, as a member of the state Ethics Committee, it is necessary for him to go to Columbia more often, Sandifer said.

"I was making trips that

people not on those committees would not have to make," he said. "I make a lot of trips to Columbia that are not reimbursed."

Sandifer said he moved into a new office in Columbia and furnished it himself at a cost of about \$2,000.

"I had to buy the furniture because the House didn't have any funding to furnish it," Sandifer said.

Legislators are paid a subsistence allowance for lodging and meals when in Columbia, but Sandifer said it doesn't cover their costs.

"To be very honest, we come out losing \$25 to \$30 per day" after paying for a room and meals, Sandifer said.

Alexander said legislators are reimbursed through the subsistence allowance for weekly trips to Columbia.

"Even if we go back and forth (home), we don't get additional travel from that standpoint," Alexander said.

Cooper is chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, which requires additional meetings in Columbia during the year. He said before becoming chairman he was near the bottom on travel costs, but the added duties push his costs higher.

"My responsibilities are basically a full-time job on a part-time salary," Cooper said.

Cooper said he bought a new car in September with 400 miles on it. Today, with trips to Columbia, it has 22,400 miles.

The payments range among state employees. For example, state Parks, Recreation and Tourism economic development manager received \$32,103 in travel costs while the head of the state's Housing Authority received \$13,727, nearly all of it in out-of-state travel, according to the comptroller general.

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Independent-Mail  
Anderson, SC  
Circ. 35254  
From Page:  
16  
1/10/2009





... as a way to show use of tax dollars, according to comptroller general officials.

Most of the spending included an in-state subsistence allowance, but also included mileage reimbursement, meals, air travel, "other transportation," registration fees and miscellaneous travel costs, according to the report.

The report is available listing travel by state agencies is available online at [www.cg.state.sc.us](http://www.cg.state.sc.us).

Independent-Mail  
Anderson, SC  
Circ. 35254  
From Page:  
16  
1/10/2009

**TRAVEL SPENDING RANKINGS**

- Area S.C. House of Representatives**
1. Bill Sandifer, R-Oconee, \$15,825
  2. Phillip Owens, R-Pickens, \$15,213
  3. Daniel Cooper, R-Anderson, \$13,855
  6. Bill Whitmire, R-Oconee, \$12,970
  8. Brian White, R-Anderson, \$12,715
  16. Don Bowen, R-Anderson, \$12,176
  25. Michael W. Gambrell, R-Anderson, \$11,826
- Area S.C. Senate members**
1. Thomas Alexander, R-Oconee, \$20,073
  7. Larry Martin, R-Pickens, \$14,460
  16. Kevin Bryant, R-Anderson, \$12,732
  18. Billy O'Dell, R-Abbeville, \$12,394
- Source: South Carolina Office of Comptroller General



**LAWMAKER PAY**

■ **South Carolina** pays its legislators \$10,400 a year, plus \$1,000 a month for district expenses, then \$131 per day subsistence pay. They also receive 44.5 cents a mile for mileage (Alabama's is 55 cents per mile), said Shirley Black, an accounting manager in the South Carolina House.

Because each legislator receives a different subsistence amount, the total pay would vary. But basing the meeting days of the second Tuesday in January to first week in June, minus one week's vacation, then the 20 weeks (60 days—three days a week) would come to \$7,860 for legislative per diem pay. Add to that \$10,400 in annual legislative pay, plus \$12,000 each year for district upkeep and costs, then a base amount for a South Carolina legislator would be \$30,360 annually, not counting any mileage. Legislators are paid one round-trip mileage check for each week they are in attendance at the General Assembly.

■ **In Alabama**, which has a population about the size of South Carolina, state legislators are paid \$10 a day salary while the legislature is in session, which could be for seven days. They also receive \$50 a day for the three legislative meeting days a week, said Jackie Osborn, accounting payroll supervisor for the Alabama Senate. The average per diem payment for a session is \$3,050, she said.

But Alabama legislators also receive a monthly expenses allowance for an average annual reimbursement of \$47,000, said Osborne and an Alabama House legislative accounting manager who asked not to be named.

When the legislature is in session, legislators receive about \$50,846 on average for the year, but that figure includes the in-session salary, per diem and "everything you will need during the year," Osborne said.