

## Salary data helps taxpayers track government spending

As the comments on this page indicate, many of you question why the Lansing State Journal would provide the names and salaries of state workers on the LSJ.com Web site.

Certainly we understand the sensitive nature of the information we provided.

But we feel a strong commitment to informing taxpayers about the nature of their government and how it spends their money.

We are committed to the principals of open government. Our state laws encourage this, even if it means providing the public with sensitive information like salaries.

Here are some of our responses to questions you have raised.

*Isn't this an invasion of privacy for state workers? How can the LSJ publish this information?*

The salaries of public employees are public record. This has long been the case. Anyone can file a request to get this same data.

*Why don't you report what everyone at the LSJ makes?*

Salary is a sensitive issue to most people. However, when people choose a job in public service, they should realize this has different obligations than taking a job with a private company.

*Even if the LSJ can publish the data, why should it do so?*

No one would question asking for the salary of some fat-cat administrator. Newspapers have done that for a long time. This database is different, but the underlying philosophy is similar. We are empowering citizens—including state workers—so they can research for themselves. They might even point out something that we should be investigating, something we haven't seen. The Internet allows us to empower our readers in ways we weren't able to do before.

*Are you saying that all state workers are overpaid?*

Absolutely not. All of us know hard-working state employees who earn every dollar. Some may be underpaid. This database lets people decide.

*Is the LSJ putting anyone in danger by publishing their name and their salary? Can't they be stalked or their identity stolen?*

We do not believe we are putting anyone in any imminent danger by publishing this information. The data is simply this: name, job/department, salary, hire date and the city where they work. We are not publishing home addresses. We are not publishing dates of birth. We are not publishing Social Security information. Of course, there is always a risk of identity theft. No one can be guaranteed safety 100 percent of the time. Every time you use a credit card you are at risk for identity theft. But we don't believe that this information puts them at any greater risk than any other person.