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Chicago City Council: highest paid overall

Salaries and number of aldermen among highest in nation

By James Ewert
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The Chicago City Council spends more on its own salaries than most other cities, according to an analysis of salary figures.

This year Chicago will spend nearly \$5 million of taxpayers' money paying 48 of its 50 aldermen \$98,125 a year (two others receive \$85,000), according to the 2006 city budget. Aldermen's jobs include everything from arranging for garbage pickup to voting on citywide legislation.

Chicago's 50 aldermanic wards rank second only to New York's 51, even though New York has slightly more than 5 million more people.

The expensive salaries have caused some in Chicago to condense the number of wards to combat government overspending.

"Seeing as we are always in some sort of budget crisis, maybe the city should think about possibly reducing how many aldermen we are paying," said Jay Stewart, executive director of the Better

Government Association, a Chicago-based group that investigates and researches government waste and inefficiency. "It would be a major change, but I think it would be something that would benefit more than just our pockets."

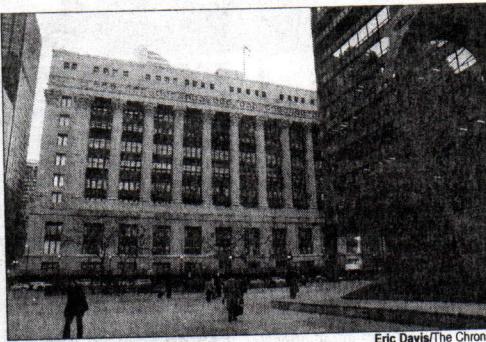
Stewart said with fewer aldermen, each would represent a larger base of people; which he said would help in creating a third party as well.

"Los Angeles gets by fine with 15 council members," Stewart said. "Granted, they pay them more, but their overall council budget is still less than Chicago's."

With nearly 800,000 more citizens than Chicago, Los Angeles spends slightly more than \$2 million on its council members' salaries, and in Houston, a city with 1 million fewer people than Chicago, the city spends \$739,970 on its 14-person council.

Alderman Burton Natrus of the 42nd Ward in the central loop said if Chicago reduced the number of wards the city would not be able to work as effectively as it currently does.

"You end up with large districts and you can't service the public," Natrus said. "The idea is to rep-



Eric Davis/The Chronicle

Chicago City Hall, 121 N. LaSalle St., spends more than \$5 million dollars each year on aldermen salaries, making the 50 positions some of the highest paid per capita.

resent smaller groups so you can give them attention. We have neighborhood-type districts, and that's what makes the city work, because we have 50 janitors."

Gary Rothkoper, a resident of Chicago's 26th Ward on the Northwest side for 12 years, said he was very surprised when he heard how much the city was spending on its aldermen and government. Rothkoper said condensing the number of wards in the city would make the fewer aldermen work harder.

"If [aldermen] had more people in their wards to look out for it would be a lot different," Rothkoper said. "With more people they would have to look at

issues in a broader sense. Now it just seems they only worry about the little things being done in their wards because that's all that really matters to them."

Rothkoper said he had no idea Chicago had so many more aldermanic districts than other cities.

According to Census 2000 data, Chicago's population stands at just under 2.9 million people. With 50 aldermen, each ward represents approximately 58,000 people. Stewart said reducing the number of aldermen to 35 would put that number at roughly 82,000 people.

"Our taxes keep getting raised and so do the aldermen's salaries," Stewart said. "It's not hard to do

the math—we get rid of 15 aldermen and we save something like \$1.4 million. I don't think it's a far-fetched idea to at least have them think about. What harm could it do?"

Bennett Lawson, spokesman for Alderman Tom Tunney of the 44th Ward, said there is absolutely no reason to even think about reducing the number of aldermen. Doing so would cause such a controversy that more important issues would get stalled substantially.

"The city has budget issues just like any other city, but that doesn't mean we have to go out and redraw the entire legislative map," Lawson said. "That would be just too big of a plan to undertake. I think the reason behind it is relevant, trying to save money, but Chicago's City Council is one of the hardest working legislative bodies in the country. There is simply not a problem pressing enough right now to warrant such a measure."

Former alderman and current University of Illinois Chicago professor of political science Dick Simpson said it is obvious that there needs to be some sort of change in city council. Simpson said having so many aldermen scattered about the city makes for a more easily swayed council.

"The more people aldermen represent, the more people they have to please, and that means they work harder," Simpson said.

A CUT ABOVE THE REST

	N.Y.	L.A.	Chicago	Houston
Population	8,008,278	3,694,820	2,896,016	1,953,631
Aldermen (City council members)	51	15	50	14
Salaries	90,000	149,000	98,125	52,855
Residents per council member	157,025	246,321	57,920	139,545

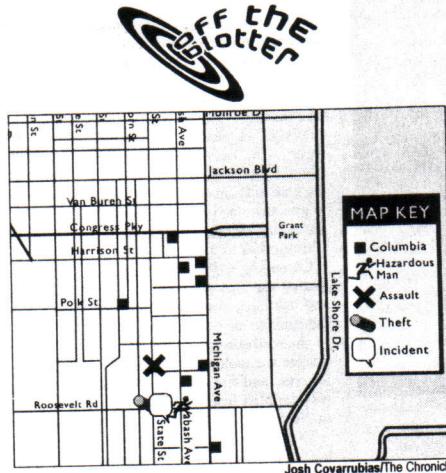
Josh Covarrubias/The Chronicle

On the road again

On Jan. 20 police officers saw a 50-year-old man walk into the road at 44 E. Roosevelt Road, trying to solicit funds from passing motorists. Officers issued the man a ticket after the situation became a hazard for both motorists and the man.

Seven times in the face

Police responded to a fight at 1007 S. State St. on Jan. 17 after an altercation between a 24-year-old man and an unknown offender. The victim told police the offender arrived at his residence and punched him seven times in the face, causing a bloody lip and a swollen jaw.



Good night without the light

Employees at Walgreens, 2 E. Roosevelt Road, called police on Jan. 17 after watching a 33-year-old man take items off the store's shelf and place them into a handbag. The offender was detained until officers arrived and searched the man. Among the items in the bag were tools, nightlights and razors totaling \$108. The man was placed under arrest and transported for processing.

Waiting for my kid

On Jan. 23, a 25-year-old man showed up at a Jewel parking lot at 1200 S. State St. to pick up his son. The man told police that he has a court order to see his son on Mondays and Thursdays. His son's mother, 28, called and told the man that she was not showing up to drop off the child. Police filed an incident report against the woman.