

Website sheds light on pay-benefits of Nev. public workers

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – Anyone with an interest in what Nevada’s state and local government employees make in salary and benefits can review the 2010 data that has been posted this month by a Nevada think tank.

The searchable database at Transparent Nevada does not yet contain all the local government salary information because not all cities and counties have responded, said Victor Joecks, communications director for the Nevada Policy Research Institute.

But most of the major cities and counties, as well as the state colleges and universities and the state of Nevada, have provided the data as requested.

The Clark County School District provided its data as well, although NPRI is still waiting on the Clark County information, Joecks said.

“We will continue with some of the places that haven’t sent us the data; we’ll continue following up and looking at that data as the year goes on,” Joecks said.

The data can be searched by name, occupation or in order of highest pay. Salaries and benefits, when provided, are listed separately, along with a column showing total compensation.

Joecks said some jurisdictions only provide base pay amounts, even though benefits can be as much as 40 percent or more of a public employee’s salary.

A search of the site shows that many of the top paid public officials in Nevada work for the Nevada System of Higher Education, including UNR head football coach Chris Ault, who earned nearly \$527,000 in compensation in 2010.

In some other cases salaries were inflated because employees were retiring and received unused sick leave and vacation pay.

One example is Joseph Forti, who took a buyout last year and retired as North Las Vegas chief of police. His 2010 salary is listed at just less than \$76,000, but total compensation is listed at \$733,000. His compensation in 2010 included \$333,000 in sick leave pay, \$43,000 in annual leave and nearly \$231,000 in a category called "Premium, Certification, Bonus and Other."

Pay for firefighters, which has been a hot button issue in Southern Nevada, is included in the database as well, but only for North Las Vegas and Henderson so far. The data does show benefits make up a big part of a fire fighter's pay.

More than 30 North Las Vegas firefighters earned in excess of \$140,000 a year in pay and benefits, according to the information provided by city officials and posted on the site.

"It's just kind of incredible all the ways that government employees get paid," Joecks said. "It's not just about their salary, it's not just about their benefits, it's not just about their salary, benefits and retirement. All of a sudden you're getting \$200,000 when you retire and that's something that doesn't happen in the private sector."