

## *RockTheCapital.org*

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### **How Much Is David G. Argall Worth? *House Reform Committee Member Socks Taxpayers***

(Harrisburg, Pa) - State House Minority Whip David Argall's (R-Schuylkill & Berks Counties) expense records reveal that the incumbent is collecting an exorbitant amount of supplemental, tax-free income in the form of "per diems." A thorough review of Rep. Argall's expenses for the period 2005 through 2007 indicates he routinely collected the maximum per diem allowable even as he assumed his duties on the Speaker's Commission on Legislative Reform.

Eric Epstein, Coordinator of the *RockTheCapital.org* stated, "Mr. Argall has a history of abusing per diems. Unfortunately for the taxpayer, there is absolutely no accountability built into the system. With all the money spent and all the miles traveled by Mr. Argall, Pennsylvania's bridges and roads continue to crumble beneath our feet. "

"Per diems" are extra cash that House and Senate members receive for every day they are in session or attend official meetings more than 50 miles from home. This "per diem" income is in addition to a legislators' base salary and the money representatives bill for mileage while traveling to Harrisburg.

Mr. Epstein added, "Elected officials are allowed to make a living, but they are not entitled to make a killing. The amount pocketed by Rep. Argall should raise questions from his constituents as to whether or not he is bilking taxpayers."

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\* Copies of Argall's expense report are available in PDF format upon request and the document will also be posted at *RockTheCapital.org*.

According to the Internal Revenue Service, “per diems” are reimbursements for expenses related to business travel, food, and lodging. In the real world, “per diems” are reported as income, and employees must provide their employers with vouchers or receipts that prove what the employee spent.

However, on “Planet Harrisburg,” legislators are not required to submit receipts or verification of the actual amount of expenses they incur for food and lodging. Many legislators routinely take the maximum per diem amount allowed – currently **\$152** - as set by the U.S. General Services Administration.

## **2005**

Mr. Argall collected a “per diem” for **129** separate days in 2005, totaling **\$15,009** in cash. Argall took the **maximum per diem 85%** of the time, and his average was **\$116**. The per diem rate for most of 2005 was \$129 before climbing to \$141.

The U.S. Census Bureau reported the **per capita income** for Berks County was **\$21,232**, and Schuylkill County recorded a per capita income of **\$17,230**. While many working people in Argall’s district face the prospect of a 35% electric rate increase, Mr. Argall zapped the taxpayers for **\$15,009** just for food and lodging for 129 days.

Mr. Argall said he donated all of his unvouchered cash to the United Way (*Morning Call*, Harrisburg Bureau, November 17, 2005), and he told the *Republican Herald* that he reported the \$7,000 as income and took a deduction on his federal tax for the charitable donation.

## **2007**

Mr. Argall’s appetite for “per diems” actually **increased** in the post-pay raise era. Rep. Argall collected a per diem for **149** separate days in 2007, (including **Reform Commission meetings**), totaling **\$16,794**. Argall’s average per diem was **\$113**. The per diem rate in 2007 rose by 5% and was set at **\$148**.

Taxpayers should ask Mr. Argall why he is charging them **\$113** a day for food and lodging. The average resident in Schuylkill County lives on **\$41.93** per day, and the average resident in Berks County lives on **\$49.43** per day for rent/mortgage payments, health care, food, electric, gas, water, and taxes. (United States Census Bureau)

Mr. Argall resides in Lake Hauto, Schuylkill County. According to MapQuest.com, it is only 78 miles from Argall's home to the Capitol (a drive of 1 hour and 28 minutes). Rep. Argall is often able to drive home from the Capitol after a session day or nonvoting business day.

On many occasions, Mr. Argall (like many regional legislators) is pocketing a \$152 per diem and either spending it all on the finest cuisine at the taxpayers' expense, or dining modestly and pocketing the remainder of the per diem, tax-free – which is good ole-fashioned “double-dipping.”

During “busy session days” representatives are usually provided with catered meals out of leadership accounts or lobbyists simply pick up the tab.

The fundamental question confronting Rep. Argall is: “Are you collecting – and pocketing tax-free – per diem money that significantly exceeds what is actually necessary to cover his true expenses for food and lodging?”

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**Next week:**

*RockTheCapital.org* will release its third and final edition of the “Voter’s Guide.” The Report will document which active legislators kept the pay raise, how they profited, and where they rank in leadership. In addition, “pension bounces” those legislators who retired with “unvouchered expenses” will be reported.

*RockTheCapital.org* is nonpartisan voter education organization formed after the Pennsylvania legislative, judicial and executive branches conspired to enact a compensation package in violation of a state constitutional provision which bans seated lawmakers from granting themselves a pay raise.