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President Obama's comment Wednesday that departing White House spokesman Robert Gibbs has worked awfully hard for his "relatively modest" pay of \$172,200 may have sounded to some like a rationalization for Gibbs joining the private sector to earn some big bucks.

But the remark to the [New York Times](#) got the attention of the [Washington Post "Federal Eye"](#) columnist, who posted a lengthy story questioning just how modest such a six-figure salary is in a weak economy with high unemployment and complaints about government spending. Gibbs' compensation falls just under the \$200,000 mark that the pre-tax-compromise Obama administration once pegged as upper income for an individual - and undeserving of a continued tax break from the Bush-era reductions.



Brendan Smialowski, Getty Images

In his briefing with reporters Wednesday, Gibbs said he loved and appreciated his job, but felt it was time for him to "step back a little, recharge some." He has no plans in the near future to write a book, he said. But "I hope to give some speeches. I will continue to provide advice and counsel to this building and to this president."

There have been some rough times, he conceded. "There are days in which -- my guess is it will happen again this week -- where you pick up that newspaper or you turn on your computer at 4:30 a.m. in the morning while your coffee is still brewing and you [see something and] groan . . . and then you get on your BlackBerry. But I think there's a usefulness to that."

So Gibbs, who has a family, wasn't complaining. "You realize that for however long you're here, it's temporary," he said. "But what endures is our government. What endures is the great experiment of democracy that's proved to be such a wonderful thing for the world."

Obama's mention of Gibbs' pay and his 24-7 schedule was accompanied in the Times story by the observation that his aide probably wanted to reflect and retool. The president didn't say anything about Gibbs wanting to make more money. He is one of 22 senior White House aides at the \$172,000 level, the Post said, far less than Obama's \$400,000 salary or the compensation of top congressional leaders.

But it still puts Gibbs at the high end of what most working Americans make -- and at a time of grumbling about the taxpayer-funded salaries and benefits of federal employees. The average federal worker earned \$67,691 in 2008, the Post's Ed O'Keefe said, citing the Bureau of Labor Statistics. President Obama has ordered a two-year freeze on pay for many federal workers.

American Federation of Government Employees President John Gage wasn't happy about that freeze. Yet Gage told the Post that "criticizing what people are making is just not the way to go. Him [Gibbs] making \$172,000, I think, just shows that's not very much pay for a job like that."

But the libertarian-leaning Cato Institute, a critic of government spending, had a different perspective. "High-level staffers like Gibbs will go on to earn very high pay in the private sector as lobbyists," [Cato Fellow Chris Edwards](#) told the Post, "so we shouldn't shed tears about their supposedly 'modest pay' in government."

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