



Six of country's 10 richest counties in D.C. area

Loudoun tops nation with \$119,525 in median household income

By: Ben Giles - December 12, 2012

Six of the 10 richest counties in the nation are in the Washington region, as median household incomes rise and Washingtonians benefit from a government-driven economy.

Loudoun County maintained its crown as the wealthiest county in the nation, with a median household income of \$119,525 in 2011, according to data released Wednesday by the U.S. Census Bureau. And Montgomery County crept back into the top 10, as its household median income rose from \$88,559 in 2010 to \$92,288 in 2011 -- a spike of more than 4 percent.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

The top 10			
Rank	County	2011 median household income	2010 median household income
1	Loudoun County	\$119,525	\$119,075
2	Los Alamos County, N.M.	\$110,204	\$105,987
3	Fairfax County	\$105,409	\$102,726
4	Hunterdon County, N.J.	\$99,216	\$97,532

5	Howard County	\$99,040	\$100,992
6	Arlington County	\$98,060	\$93,231
7	Douglas County, Colo.	\$95,973	\$97,806
8	Somerset County, N.J.	\$95,915	\$93,777
9	Prince William County	\$93,101	\$91,290
10	Montgomery County	\$92,288	\$88,559

Fairfax County held on to its ranking as the third-richest county in the country, while Stafford County was bumped from the top 10 by Prince William and Montgomery counties.

Statewide, Maryland's No. 1-ranked \$70,075 household median income ranks well ahead of the national median of \$50,502 annually -- so do the District and Virginia, with median household incomes of \$62,087 and \$61,877, respectively.

"I think this is probably the nation's wealthiest region overall, and that wealth supports an array of public and private services that are in many ways a lot better than what poorer parts of the country can enjoy," said Alan Berube, senior fellow at the Brookings Institution.

Credit for the high pay can be given to a job market focused around federal and state government work, according to Tad DeHaven, budget analyst at the Cato Institute.

"I don't think there's any doubt about it. I'd also throw into that private government contractors as well. Then you get the lobbyists, folks involved in the legal profession," DeHaven said. "This is the epicenter of government."

The demographics of the Washington region's workforce play a part in the high wages for residents as well -- a white-collar job market and a high percentage of women in the workforce contribute to many houses where multiple residents bring in top dollar, according to Stephen Fuller, director of the Center for Regional Analysis at George Mason University.

What the census data doesn't show are the higher costs of living in the region, but that contributes to a high quality of life -- Washingtonians can afford a network of consumer

services that allow residents to continue working in their high-power jobs while keeping their personal lives in order, Fuller said.

But it also means it's an unequal region, according to Berube.

"We have a lot of landscapers and a lot of child care workers, people whose livelihood depend on the people on the high end," Berube said.

Even with some disparity, the nation's capital region compares favorably with most other parts of the country, DeHaven said.

"You ever seen or read 'The Hunger Games'? It's Panem -- everybody is in various districts producing stuff so D.C. can get a nice, big chunk of the loot," he said.

The new census data are similar to the American Community Survey numbers released by the agency in September, but provide a more thorough picture of each county's wealth.