

## Letter from the Editor – Are you really glad he’s going?

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**Hollywood, MD** - I see it every day on social media from my treasured conservative friends. It’s hard to tell if they are more excited about the pending Trump presidency or the fact that Barack Obama is leaving the White House. “Thank goodness he’s going off the payroll,” right? Hold the phone! Off the payroll? Nothing could be further from the truth.

For the past few years many anti-Obama-ites have expressed fears that he would declare himself king or something before he was supposed to leave office. My guess is President Obama has had January 21, 2017 circled on his calendar for a long time, possibly with the words “woo-hoo” written in the square. For you see, that will be the first full day Obama begins one of the best jobs anyone in America could possibly covet—ex-president.

Thanks to the Former Presidents Act (FPA), which was passed in 1958—before Obama was born—the ex-president receives a pension, has support staff, receives mail and office expense funds, travel reimbursement and Secret Service. Currently, the annual pension a former president receives is nearly \$200,000. There have been efforts by Congress to cap that. For staff the federal government allocates \$150,000 for the first two-and-a-half years and \$96,000 annually thereafter. The former president receives \$1 million per year for travel with former first ladies getting \$500,000. The Secret Service protection is a flexible component—Richard Nixon declined this perk several years after leaving the White House.

So what does a former president have to do to receive these perks? In a word, breathe. If you are an Obama supporter, this likely seems to be appropriate compensation for a job well done. If you aren’t an Obama fan, well, it’s kind of like paying alimony.

Consider this—as he leaves office, Barack Obama is 55 years-old. Two of the living ex-presidents—George H.W. Bush and Jimmy Carter—are well into their 90s. Reagan and Ford both lived to be 90-plus so there may be a trend there. Obama could have the longest ex-presidency ever.

“Well I bet Biden isn’t getting much,” you say. Well, you are “sort of” correct. The former vice president only gets a pension based on his service in Congress. For Joe Biden that’s a good thing since he was a U.S. senator before becoming vice president. He will be getting a six-figure pension. He will also receive moving expenses. According to political writer Bill McMorris, in a 2014 speech Biden told the White House Summit on Working Families “I have no savings account but I have a great pension and a great salary.” McMorris did not indicate in his story whether Biden received applause for that line.

Admittedly, for a lot of wealthy Americans, \$200,000 a year for life is chump change. But a former U.S. president can also feather his nest with book deals and speaking engagements. The distinction of once being chief executive means big bucks. That of course is not taxpayer money.

All this is a far cry from Harry S Truman, a president who everyone thought would lose the 1948 Election and was booed at Griffith Stadium after firing General MacArthur. Truman left the White House in 1953, returned to Missouri, published two volumes of memoirs, enjoyed regular walks, sipped his favorite bourbon and was never shy about commenting on the current state of political affairs. He received no pension for his service as president and steadfastly refused to parlay his stature for monetary gain. It seems living a good life after having the honor of serving as president ought to be enough like it was for Harry. But now there’s so much more to be reaped.

As Jan. 21 approaches we say, “Enjoy your daily golf game, Mr. President.”

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Contact Marty Madden at [marty.madden@thebaynet.com](mailto:marty.madden@thebaynet.com)

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