

8. When a bus driver earns more than the mayor of the city of Madison

Matichon on-line www.matichon.co.th

March 6th, 2010

By Fa - Yenjit Satiratmongkolsuk

How can it be that someone who is an elected representative of the people who is a politician is not involved in corruption?

That is the question I ask myself as I look at conditions in Thailand today, where the situation is hotter than the temperature in the March dry season. I still have not found an answer.

To reduce the heat of my feelings, I embrace the cold of a distant land, Madison, Wisconsin. Now the snow is slowly melting as Spring approaches, after I have been frozen to the bone since I came here at the end of January this year.

I saw a fascinating news article in the *Wisconsin State Journal* newspaper which I will tell you about. The headline read, "Madison metro driver the highest paid city employee".

The issue raised was that the highest paid government worker in 2009 was not the city mayor, not the chief of police, and not the head of the bus company in Madison.

It was a bus driver, John E. Nelson, who received a payment, including overtime, of \$159,258 in 2009. Just his overtime and other non-salary income came to \$109,892.

A colleague of Nelson, Greg Tatman, was paid \$125,598. Those men were among the 20 highest paid bus drivers in Madison.

There were an additional seven bus drivers who each earned more than \$100,000 for the year. Nelson and his colleagues said they wanted to thank the Metrobus labor union which had worked hard for the benefit of union members to insure they received full remuneration for their work.

Chuck Camp, the general manager of public transportation, received a substantial salary of \$118,690, as well. He said that the drivers of the electric buses followed work regulations and schedules to insure safety and good service for passengers. In the past, bus drivers had to fight for appropriate remuneration and against limitations on overtime pay. That went on for an extended time before they achieved their goal. Drivers of public transport must sign an annual contract with the government, and they receive a wage of \$26.02 per hour.

The statistics released for 2009 showed that remuneration of all workers totaled \$1.94 million of which \$476,200 was paid to drivers of public transportation.

The budget statistics for Madison showed that the 20 highest paid employees, who each received more than \$125,000, included Dean Brasser, the comptroller who was paid \$151,551, and Noble Wray, the chief of the Madison police, who was paid \$143,585.

The Mayor of the city of Madison, Dave Cieslewicz, received \$112,880, but he was not in the top 20.

The large amount of money paid to public transport drivers became a source of controversy, but given the amount of time they had to work for an hourly wage, if there were not good overtime pay and other benefits, who would be willing to do their job?

In the winter season, driving in the snow on slippery streets, the risk to the driver and the passengers is considerable. Even salaries in the top 20 for the city can not changethe fact that winter driving is a challenge.

But what about Thailand? Bus drivers sit and breathe the polluted air with smoke, dust, and toxic chemicals, yet they have little power to negotiate for their rights.

Perhaps it is because they are so stressed out that they drive erratically just to relieve tension?