



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on February 15, 2012

Taxpayers Clipped to Keep Senate Barbershop Afloat

According to a report in *The Daily*, the barbershop opened in 1859 and strictly served Senators, whose tonsorial treatments were provided at taxpayer expense, until the early 1970s, when it was opened to the public — with the proviso that Senators and Senate employees take precedence over the people they are allegedly serving. Senators now have to pay for their own haircuts, though of course their salaries are extracted from taxpayers as well.



And those hair services aren't exactly bargains: \$20 for a trim; \$27 for a shampoo, cut, and blow dry; and \$105 for highlights. Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) — for whom, judging from his [official photo](#), a \$20 cut works out to about a buck a follicle — told *The Daily* that he pays less than half that price, before adding a tip, back in his home state.

With prices like that, how can the barbershop be so deeply in the red? General government incompetence aside, the prime reason seems to be that the shop's employees are unionized federal workers. "They are using union labor," former Sen. Peter Fitzgerald (R-Ill.) told *The Daily*, "and so their benefits and wages are higher than those of many jobs." The iPad newspaper elaborates, contrasting the Senate barbershop with the private Capitol Barber, which is just three blocks away:

Capitol's four barbers and stylists made \$22,000 to \$30,000 last year with no benefits, manager Lynn Dang said. At the Senate barbershop, formally called Senate Hair Care Services, the top four barbers and stylists made more than twice that — \$54,761; \$70,349; \$73,658; and \$81,641 — plus they have a generous 401(k) plan, health care and paid vacation. In all, the government contributed \$230,000 in benefits for the barbershop, the Senate Appropriations Committee said.

The government, in fact, did not contribute a thing. Americans, whose median income is just over \$39,000, were forced to cough up the dough to keep this failing government enterprise, with its overpriced employees, afloat.

"The barbershop," notes *The Daily*, "is an institution," and one that Senators of both parties "agree ... is first rate," which means it isn't going away anytime soon. The question is: How can it be made solvent?

Terrance Gainer, the [Senate sergeant at arms](#), thinks he has the answer: privatization. Gainer, who oversees the barbershop, told *The Daily* that he recognizes that the shop is "costing the government money, and that includes taxpayers like you and me." Having made a career of government at various levels, he is under no illusions that the shop's balance sheet can be righted from within; but he is still reluctant to pursue privatization, saying, "I just have not pulled the trigger. That's on me." The fact that



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he serves at the pleasure of a chamber dominated by Democrats, who generally dislike the private sector and adore unionized government employees, may have something to do with it, too.

Whether or not the barbershop is ultimately privatized, it provides a valuable object lesson in the inability of government to run a business. If elected officials and their appointees can't even keep a small beauty parlor in the black, why on earth should they be trusted to run auto companies, mortgage lenders, and the healthcare system?



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