

**chevy** owner appreciation days

**\$3,000** total cash back!

Includes \$1,000 Loyalty Cash for owners/lessees of 1999 or newer GM vehicle. Take delivery by 2/28/11. Not available with other offers. See dealer for details.

SHOP CHEVY

**★chron** | Houston & Texas News



NEWS SPORTS BUSINESS ENTERTAINMENT LIFE TRAVEL BLOGS JOBS HOMES CARS CLASSIFIEDS

[Facebook](#) [Twitter](#)

[135 Comments](#) [Recommend](#) [65](#)

Search [advanced search](#) | [archives](#)

Chron.com  Web Search by **YAHOO!**  Businesses

## What your public agencies pay their public faces

Survey finds range of duties, size of staff make comparison hard

By **MIKE MORRIS**  
HOUSTON CHRONICLE  
Feb. 5, 2011, 9:15PM



Handout photo

Former KPRC anchor Jerome Gray will earn \$170,000 annually as chief spokesman for Metro. But one local watchdog says Gray's pay appears "questionable ... when everybody is cutting back."

Next week, Jerome Gray, a former **TV anchor** with no background in public transit, is scheduled to start work as chief spokesman for Metro, earning \$170,000 annually.

Argentina James, vice president for public affairs at the Port of **Houston** Authority until last October, was pulling in \$180,000 a year and continues to collect \$15,000 a month for consulting work.

Both seem like large sums to pay for public agency spokespeople. Are they?

Among counterparts at more than 15 local public agencies surveyed by the **Houston Chronicle**, Gray is the highest paid.

Pay ranges widely among local and state spokespeople, from \$64,000 to \$250,000. The staffs they oversee also vary, from one colleague to more than three dozen workers. The average spokesman's salary among state and local offices analyzed is \$101,342.

No comparison of this kind is clean-cut. Each agency tailors its communications department to fit its mission and divides the work among its employees differently. In the Chronicle comparison, the standard used was: Whom would a journalist call at an agency in a crisis?

Though **Gray's** salary tops those at all other local agencies, Metro president and CEO George Greanias said the agency's executive salaries and compensation packages have been trimmed since he took the helm last year.

Gray's salary is 18 percent lower than that of his predecessor, George Smalley, who was making \$208,246 after six years as Metro's vice president for communications and senior press officer when he left Jan. 3.

A salary such as Gray's sounds high by any measure, said **Talmadge Hefflin**, director of the center for fiscal policy at the **Texas Public Policy Foundation**.

"It certainly appears that is a questionable salary at a time when everybody is cutting back, from the state on down to the local school districts," Hefflin said. "To have a hire like this at a time like

this, it's a little bit unusual."

### Metro 'getting a bargain'

Greanias disagreed, saying he expects Gray to help develop Metro's strategy and to advise him on key issues.

"When you look at Jerome's credentials, his resume and his market worth, Metro's getting a bargain," Greanias said. "I appreciate the fact that his family and he have both felt that serving the community and serving Metro's mission is important enough to justify some sacrifice on their part."

The seniority of an agency's chief communicator ranges widely at each institution. The same positions at two separate agencies also often have different duties.

At the state's two largest universities, these roles are filled by vice presidents, who top the salary list at roughly a quarter-million dollars per year. Those men manage dozens of staff and oversee large marketing and publications operations and, in the case of Don Hale's department at the University of Texas, coordinate special events, such as commencement, in addition to handling media inquiries.

At the **Houston Police Department**, by contrast, four public information officers combine to handle a slew of media inquiries, often after hours, and also market department initiatives. Those workers' supervisor is a deputy director who oversees more than 40 other employees and has only indirect contact with reporters, said HPD's John Cannon.

At the **Harris County Hospital District**, corporate communications staff spend just 5 percent of their time handling news media inquiries, spokesman Bryan McLeod estimated. The remainder is spent preparing publications, posting online content, planning events and other internal matters.

### Big firms pay even more

**chevy** owner appreciation days

**\$1,000** Owner Loyalty Cash on Most '10 & '11 Models!

**\$3,000** total cash back!

SHOP CHEVY

Includes \$1,000 Loyalty Cash for owners/lessees of 1999 or newer GM vehicle. Take delivery by 2/28/11. Not available with other offers. See dealer for details.

**Ex-KPRC anchor's pay tops salaries for agency spokespeople**

**Desmond Howard says he felt threatened by Phil Simms**

**HPD seeks suspect in boyfriend killing**

**Aftermath of storm crashes leaves drivers in limbo**

**Casey: Anger, but no riots after HPD beating video**

**Justice: Dallas not looking so super as Big Game nears(318)**

**Reagan revolution changed the course of Texas politics(152)**

**Police: Man flees after killing ex's new boyfriend(143)**

**Storm aftermath leaves drivers in limbo(139)**

**Casey: Anger, but no riots after HPD beating video(124)**

**Feds are slow to react to rapid rise in Texas overdoses**

**1 killed, 1 hurt in traffic accident in Katy**

**Cold air will return to Houston area on Wednesday**

**Police: Deputy shoots man after he points gun in N. Harris Co.**

**Kingwood woman accused of trying to take pot into jail**

**Brace yourself for another freeze, Houston**

**Complaints against HPD officers often stick**

At the Port of Houston, James' replacement, Olga Rodriguez, who makes \$156,000 annually, oversees 13 employees across three departments, only one of which directly handles media inquiries.

Asked about Gray's above-average salary, Greanias avoided comparing Metro with other agencies, saying he has no knowledge of their communications needs.

"I'm simply looking at the experience that I have here. Metro is constantly asked for information," he said. "The workload here, in terms of responding — which is something we're serious about doing — is very, very large. It merits first-class, professional support, and in Jerome Gray that's what we've received."

Professionalism in the news media and success in an executive public relations role may require different skills. Whether someone can make the switch depends on the person, said Ward White, chief strategy officer of Edelman Southwest, the regional arm of an international public relations firm.

Speaking from inside the [Jimmy Carter Library and Museum](#) in Atlanta, where he was attending an event, White referenced Carter's history as a peanut farmer.

"Is a peanut farmer qualified to be president of the United States?" he said, "Well, it depends on the peanut farmer, doesn't it?"

White, who lives part-time in Houston, spent 15 years as vice president of communications for Northwestern Mutual and said spokespersons for the nation's largest firms can make \$500,000 a year or more. In that context, he said, Metro's choice seems less glaring.

"Building harmonious, two-way relationships with the constituencies that are critical to Metro's success is a big job," White said. "Does the salary offend me? Not in the slightest. I think it's an important post and funding at that level's not inappropriate."

[mike.morris@chron.com](mailto:mike.morris@chron.com)

**Read More**

From Chron.com:

Powered by one spot

[Gray: A lesson in architecture](#)

"How many people here know what architects do?" Phil Freelon asked the class. Only a few hands went up, and I began to worry.

[Armed man shot to death in south-central Houston...](#)

A man fatally shot an armed man allegedly threatening a group of people in a south-central Houston home Sunday afternoon,...

[Tally of Houston homeless will help determine...](#)

More than 400 volunteers scoured Harris County and some parts of Fort Bend County last week, searching in parks, under...

[Quarterly report: Houston economy improves, slowly](#)

Houston's economy is improving slowly, boosted by stable oil and natural gas prices and slightly looser credit but still plagued by high...

[Brace yourself for another freeze, Houston](#)

Forecasters say a strong cold front will push through the area on Wednesday, but the white stuff is unlikely.

From Around the Web:



[Shamed Fifa vice-president to appeal World Cup bribery ban](#)

Feb 07, 2011 | Football news, match reports and fixtures |...

[Leading Automotive Service and Retail Chain Pep Boys Selects JMPR Public Relations as Agency of...](#)

Feb 07, 2011 | PR Newswire: Entertainment & Media

[Egypt's vice president offers concessions](#)

Feb 07, 2011 | Stuff.co.nz - World

[Premature Graying of Hair and Quickly Stop Premature Graying of Hair](#)

Feb 07, 2011 | Wellness Blogs



[Local Houston players represent at Austin Street Fighter tournament](#)

Feb 07, 2011 | Examiner Games Channel Articles

ADVERTISEMENT

Related Topics:

[Progressive Conservative Party candidates, 2007 Manitoba provincial election](#) • [Jimmy Carter Library and Museum](#) • [Texas Public Policy Foundation](#) • [Houston Chronicle](#) • [Harris County Hospital District](#)



**Add Your Comment**

**New to the site?**

To use commenting, you need to sign up.

**Already a member?**

Please log in.

[Forgot Password?](#)

**Email**

**Password**

Remember Me

Most Popular Comments



**Mike\_in\_TX** 1:34 AM on February 6, 2011

I bet they could have someone eager to do the job for 80,000 dollars a year. I wish they would release the list of applicants and people interviewed so they could back up their decision. I doubt Mr. Gray took a pay cut from the tv news business. One other thing what other benefits did he get. Maybe a car, full retirement in months, free health care, expense account. I wish they would disclose this or maybe the reporter of this article will ask for us.

REPLY (90) (12) POPULARITY: 78 [Report Abuse]

5 replies



**ChicanoNation** 2:34 AM on February 6, 2011

Exorbitant salaries paid to basically keep a chair warm and disseminate information. A taxpayer waste perhaps.

REPLY (84) (10) POPULARITY: 74 [Report Abuse]

1 reply



**seriousfan** 2:07 AM on February 6, 2011

Gee, It's real easy to justify large salaries when someone else is paying for them, yours included. The city has got to cut services but not salaries, where did it all go wrong. Why aren't these job placements announced to the public taxpayer before they are given out...hmn. Too many questions and either no answers or we get treated to cases of convient amnesia or total stupidity.

REPLY (70) (7) POPULARITY: 63 [Report Abuse]

**View Comments (135)**

**Mortgage Rates Hit 2.99%**

If you owe less than \$729k you probably  
www.SeeRefinanceRates.com

**"Weird Fruit Burns Fat"**

Reporter Drops 32 Pounds in 28 Days with  
www.5NewsTV.com

**1 tip for a flat belly**

News: Follow 1 bizarre tip and lose  
eatcleandiet.com/news

**2011's Best Diet Pills**

Lose Weight. Burn Belly Fat.  
www.DietRatings.org

Ads by Yahoo!

<p><b>CHRON</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Home</li> <li>Houston &amp; Texas</li> <li>Nation</li> <li>Business</li> <li>Sports</li> <li>Entertainment</li> <li>Life</li> <li>Travel</li> <li>Corrections</li> <li>Blogs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Weather</li> <li>Chron Commons</li> <li>Traffic</li> </ul> <p><b>TOPICS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Small Business</li> <li>PetsHouston</li> <li>MomHouston</li> <li>HoustonBelief</li> <li>Gardening</li> <li>29-95</li> </ul>	<p><b>NEIGHBORHOODS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aldine</li> <li>Alief</li> <li>Baytown</li> <li>Bellaire</li> <li>Clear Lake</li> <li>Conroe</li> <li>Cy-Fair</li> <li>East End</li> <li>Fort Bend</li> <li>Heights</li> <li>Katy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kingwood</li> <li>Lake Houston</li> <li>Magnolia</li> <li>Memorial</li> <li>Montrose</li> <li>Pasadena</li> <li>Pearland</li> <li>Spring</li> <li>Tomball</li> <li>West U</li> <li>The Woodlands</li> </ul>	<p><b>MARKETPLACE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jobs</li> <li>Homes</li> <li>Cars</li> <li>Classifieds</li> <li>Place a classified ad</li> <li>Place a retail ad</li> <li>Contests</li> </ul>	<p><b>SERVICES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Help</li> <li>Business directory</li> <li>Legal notices</li> <li>Contact us</li> <li>Send us tips</li> <li>About the company</li> <li>Employment opportunities</li> <li>Advertise with us</li> <li>Buy a banner ad</li> </ul>	<p><b>MEMBERSHIP</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sign up</li> <li>Log in</li> </ul> <p><b>OTHER EDITIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Home delivery</li> <li>Mobile</li> <li>RSS feeds</li> <li>Chronicle In Education</li> <li>e-Edition</li> <li>Breaking news alerts</li> </ul>
--	---	---	--	--	---	---

**LOCAL SERVICES**

Houston Attorneys Houston Salons Houston HVAC Contractors



Privacy statement | Terms of service | About Our Ads

Copyright © 2011 The Houston Chronicle

