

Statement from J. Kenneth Blackwell regarding State Auditor Mary Taylor's special audit of the Ohio Secretary of State:

Throughout my two terms as secretary of state, I used bonuses, early retirement and buyout programs as a way to efficiently manage my office. The bonus program in question was similar to previous secretary of state programs approved by the Department of Administrative Services. At the Auditor's invitation and my request, former DAS director Scott Johnson confirmed his prior approval of these programs to State Auditor Mary Taylor's audit staff.

It was a prudent, long-standing and cost-effective way of conducting business. And, it was well within my authority as an executive officeholder. In fact, these payments actually resulted in a net savings for taxpayers because some employees agreed to forego unemployment compensation based on the bonus amount they selected. Further, keeping these important public servants on staff, through the end of my term, to certify the 2006 election results and process year-end business services filings was vital to the office's operational efficiency. The bonuses secured their services.

Applying new Attorney General Opinions retrospectively to the approved past practices of statewide constitutional officeholders is troubling and sets a dangerous precedent. If Auditor Taylor and Attorney General Marc Dann believe this is a prudent course of action, they should pursue even and comprehensive enforcement of this new legal interpretation.

For example, much larger compensation packages have been issued to state employees by former State Treasurer Mary Ellen Withrow (\$1.2 million), the Ohio State University Board of Trustees (\$250,000) and the Ohio House (\$89,500). Those were one-time payments based on selective criteria. And, OSU's payment was not part of a negotiated individual contract, according to comments Trustee Chairman G. Gilbert Cloyd made to the Columbus Dispatch.

- J. Kenneth Blackwell