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## D.C. Suburbs Top List Of Richest Counties

Nationwide Data on Health Coverage Bleak

By [Amy Goldstein and Dan Keating](#)

Washington Post Staff Writers  
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The three most prosperous large counties in the United States are in the Washington suburbs, according to census figures released yesterday, which show that the region has the second-highest income and the least poverty of any major metropolitan area in the country.

Rapidly growing Loudoun County has emerged as the wealthiest jurisdiction in the nation, with its households last year having a median income of more than \$98,000. It is followed by Fairfax and Howard counties, with Montgomery County not far behind.

That accumulation of suburban wealth, local economists said, is a side effect of the enormous flow of federal money into the region through contracts for defense and homeland security work in the five years since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, coming after the local technology boom of the 1990s. "When you put that together . . . you have a recipe for heightened prosperity," said Anirban Basu, an economist at a Baltimore consulting firm.

### National Trends

In 2005, the national median household income edged up, the poverty rate stopped climbing and a record number of people lacked health insurance, according to new census figures.

Median household income  
Adjusted for inflation, 2005 dollars



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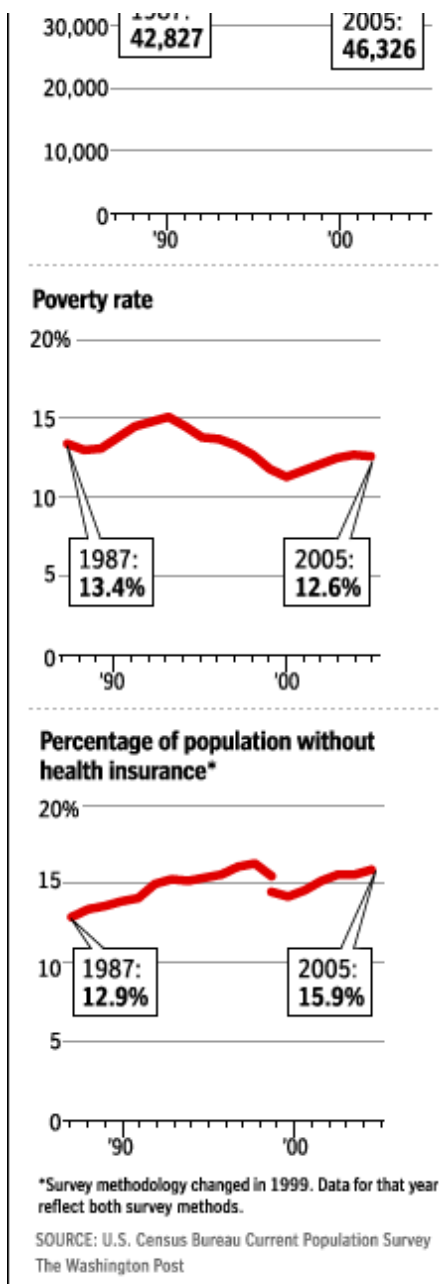
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The result is that the Washington area's households rank second in income only to those in San Jose, eclipsing such well-heeled places as San Francisco and the bedroom suburbs of New York.

The new portrait of Washington's affluence came into view at the same time that the U.S. Census Bureau released separate data providing a far more nuanced depiction of Americans' financial well-being. The new figures showed that a record number of Americans lack access to health insurance.

According to the national figures from the bureau's Current Population Survey, the median household income edged up -- by 1.1 percent in 2005 -- for the first time since President Bush took office in 2001. And the poverty rate stopped climbing, with 12.6 percent of the people in the United States living in poverty last year -- approximately the same proportion as in 2004. About 37 million people were poor last year, including nearly one child in six and nearly one of every four blacks and Hispanics of all ages.

The data make it clear that, four years into a recovery from the country's last economic recession, improved finances are reaching different groups of people selectively. The rich continued to get richer. Between 2004 and last year, earnings increased by an



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average of nearly \$1,200 for people with incomes in the top 10 percent, compared with \$17 for those in the bottom 10 percent.

With congressional elections approaching in November, yesterday's numbers were immediately seized on by Republican and Democratic politicians and their allies, seeking to use the statistics as a referendum on the economic policies of the Bush White House and the Republican-led Congress.

White House budget director Rob Portman said the census report "tells us that in 2005, 90,000 fewer people were living in poverty and real average income rose for families in every income quintile." Portman said those improvements, despite the 2001 attacks and recession, are "a testament to the strong work ethic of the American people, the resiliency of our economy, and pro-growth economic policies, including tax relief."

But Rep. Charles B. Rangel (N.Y.), the ranking Democrat on the House Ways and Means Committee, said: "I know what they say about putting lipstick on a pig, but I don't see how the Bush administration can spin these numbers in their favor. The underlying truth is, Republican economic policies have left most Americans behind."

Republicans were silent about the health insurance figures, which show that the number of Americans without coverage rose to an all-time high of 46.6 million. The proportion of the population that is uninsured increased from 15.6 percent in 2004 to 15.9 percent last year. That erosion stemmed partly from a continuing decline in the number of people who get insurance through their

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jobs. And for the first time in recent years, government health programs, such as Medicaid and Medicare, stopped growing.

Diane Rowland, executive director of the Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured, said "the most disturbing thing" is that the number of children without health coverage increased for the first time in years.

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