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House GOP, Obama Official Spar Over Federal Worker Pay

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The pay and benefits of federal workers came under attack on Capitol Hill Wednesday as House Republicans claimed during a hearing titled "Are Federal Workers Underpaid?" that federal workers were far too well paid compared with their private sector workers.

But those assertions were contradicted by a federal official who said such claims were inaccurate because they were based on data not directly comparable. He also said it was wrong to denigrate federal workers.

In his written opening statement at a hearing of a House Oversight and Government Reform subcommittee, the panel's chairman, Rep. Dennis Ross, said:

According to the Office of Personnel Management the average salary for federal employees was \$74,311 in 2010. The average private sector worker earned \$50,462, according to an August 10, 2010 analysis conducted by the Cato Institute. The federal government also pays an average of 36 percent of employees' base pay health insurance and pension benefits, in addition to generous paid leave. Taken together, federal employees on average earned \$101,628 in total compensation in 2010, nearly four times more than the average private sector worker.

The Members of this Subcommittee recognize that our talented federal workforce performs critically essential missions throughout the government, on behalf of our nation. We appreciate their service. Federal employees should be compensated fairly. Yet, current federal salaries and benefits are not in line with the marketplace when compared to private workforce compensation.

In a time when our economy is in a recession, the contrast between government and private sector pay is troubling. The federal government has no incentive or obligation to reduce salaries in order to be competitive to stay in business. It can simply borrow money or raise taxes.

With federal spending and unemployment at or near record highs, this hearing presents an opportunity for lawmakers of this committee to hear important testimony from our distinguished witnesses on how best to address the growing pay disparity between the federal civilian and private sector workforce.

Over the past decade, compensation of private sector employees has not kept pace with that of federal employees. Moreover, federal workers receive generous benefits – vacation, health insurance, pension plans, retirement savings, and disability pay. These benefits greatly exceed those that are normally provided to the private sector workforce.

Responding to such claims, John Berry, director of the Office of Personnel Management, said in his prepared testimony:

We have been fortunate throughout our history to have talented and hardworking individuals willing to forgo more lucrative careers and step forward for public service. It is the mission of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to recruit, retain and honor that world-class workforce to serve the American people. In order to do this, we must provide pay and benefits on par with other large companies for whom we compete for talent. We cannot and should not be the employer of last resort.

Federal employees hold lives in their hands and oversee large sums of taxpayer money. We need talented and innovative people at the Department of Defense supporting our war fighters. We need great doctors, nurses, and scientists at our Veterans Hospitals and the National Institutes of Health doing life saving work. We need creative and

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