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New OPM task force to study pay gap

By **STEPHEN LOSEY** | Last Updated: March 24, 2010

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The Obama administration's personnel chief has assigned a task force to come up with "ironclad data" showing that feds do not earn far more than their private-sector counterparts.

The move comes after organizations such as the libertarian Cato Institute and conservative lawmakers have criticized federal employees' pay, which they say is more than 50 percent higher on average than private-sector salaries.

Office of Personnel Management Director John Berry told Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, at a Senate Appropriations Committee that such statements are "misinformation" and are not based on like comparisons.

The federal workforce has become more educated and specialized in recent years as the government has hired more people in fields such as financial regulation, medical research, cybersecurity and law enforcement. Many salary comparisons that appear to show feds are overpaid mix in service industry jobs, such as restaurant workers, that are not in much demand in the federal workforce. When employees that do similar jobs, with similar levels of education, are compared, Berry said pay differences evaporate.

"The skill sets required for the federal government to meet its responsibilities in the 21st century continue to increase in complexity," Berry said.

Berry said there may be some instances where federal employees do earn more than private sector employees doing comparable work, and he said those salaries should be lowered.

Collins told Berry he raised good points, but said his message is not reaching a larger audience.

The belief that federal employees are vastly overpaid "is gaining currency," Collins said. "I'm starting to hear it more and more ... from colleagues and constituents. You need to respond to that."

Berry also said OPM needs power to enter into longer-term contracts with companies to provide long-term care insurance to try to avoid frequent premium increases for federal employees.

OPM was harshly criticized last year after it announced that a long-term care insurance option for federal employees — previously advertised as having no future premium increases — would actually increase up to 25 percent under a new seven-year contract with John Hancock Life and Health Insurance Co.


"We'll find ourselves in this situation every seven years," Berry said. "We've got to design [contracts] for the longer term, and not seven-year slices."

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 **FedHRXpert** wrote:
 It's unfortunate the OPM chose to do or say nothing during the height of the federal pay "misinformation" articles. Instead, OPM opted to do what it has been doing of late in the face of any federal personnel controversy - nothing. At least several federal employee unions had the courage to respond to the "misinformation" articles which is more than what OPM did. - leaving federal employees "out to dry." This is because despite all of the SES, GS-14 & 15 HR experts at the OPM, they don't have the expertise or interest in conducting such detailed pay studies despite their p.d.s reading these OPM employees are "experts in pay administration... conduct studies.." etc. These p.d.s. are available through FOIA requests



"The skill sets required for the federal government to meet its responsibilities in the 21st century continue to increase in complexity," OPM Director John Berry said. (ROB CURTIS / STAFF)



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and are very insightful. Yet, it takes the President of the United States to direct the OPM to conduct a study on federal pay. Why is the OPM unable or unwilling to take charge/demonstrate it's leadership in the area of federal personnel? Can OPM get ahead of the curve?

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