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Federal workers crying foul over pay hike freeze

It is "a slap at working people To symbolically hit at federal employees I think is just wrong." — **American Federation of Government Employees President John Gage's reaction to President Barack Obama's proposal to freeze federal wages for two years**

Federal employees, they're different than you and I.

There must be something in the water of the Potomac that triggers hallucinations.

Calling a \$5 billion cut symbolic isn't the worst of it.

Terming the move a "slap at working people" shows federal workers - at least their union bosses in the comfy coziness of the Land of DC with its job security, platinum health and retirement benefits and endless \$100,000 plus civil servant salaries - are as out of touch with economic reality as Paris Hilton.

Try to name someone you know who hasn't experienced a wage freeze, reduced hours, a cut in pay or loss in employment during the past three years. Someone, that is, besides a federal worker.

City, county and state workers have all been hit with furlough days. For those back along the Potomac that's a nice way of saying they get to take a pay cut while keeping their jobs.

Federal employees got a 1.9 percent pay increase last year. And unless Congress takes action before the end of the year, they will get a 0.9 percent pay increase on Jan. 1. Compare that to many state workers that essentially have taken a 10 percent pay cut as well as Manteca city and school employees that have not just taken cuts starting at 3.8 percent of their salary but did so two years ago and are now in the midst of their second year of reduced pay.

While their union bosses aren't thrilled about it, they know they've got it a lot better than the private sector where benefits are being shed faster than cat hair on a 110-degree day. People are happy to have a job even if their hours have been cut back severely.

Gage isn't the only federal union workers' boss to go ballistic about the President's bid to make sure the chosen bureaucrats share America's collective pain.

The head of the National Treasury Employees union Colleen Kelley has pledged to work overtime to derail the proposal in Congress by getting the Democrats to turn on the President before the current session ends and the Republicans take over the House.

Kelley vowed "to do everything we can to make this not happen."

In case you're wondering the largest employer in this country isn't Walmart or any corporation for that matter. It's the federal government with 2 million civil service employees excluding the Postal Service. The Great Recession has passed them by without worries of a job cut or reduction in pay or benefits. In fact, Uncle Sam plans to hire an additional 273,000 workers from October 2009 through October 2012. The Partnership for Public Service notes that is a 41 percent jump in the rate of creating new federal jobs over the three years. Go ask a private sector concern if they will be able to do that.

A USA Today analysis of federal data in March showed an average federal worker makes \$67,691 a year based on Bureau of Labor statistics. And in similar positions in the federal government versus the private sector the federal employee makes 20 percent more. Well, not exactly. If you count the difference in retirement and health benefits it is even more than that. In the latest year for comparable data, federal employee benefits averaged \$40,875 per worker in 2008 compared to \$9,982 per private worker based on information gleaned from the Bureau of Economic Analysis.

When you lump all federal workers together against all private sector workers the CATO Institute using data collected by Uncle Sam determined the average federal worker makes \$120,000 in wages and benefits compared to \$60,000 for the average private sector worker.

And you know who is paying the salary of federal workers? One hint, it isn't just Mr. Gage or Ms. Kelley who undoubtedly haven't had pay freezes or pay cuts.

The odds are a lot of non-federal workers in America today wouldn't mind a little symbolic relief from Washington., D.C., even if is just a paltry \$5 billion as Mr. Gage implies.

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