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EDITORIAL: Obama's federal jobs

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Employment is up, wages are up, and job security is as firm as ever. Unfortunately, this is only true for federal government workers.

President Obama is presiding over the largest federal work force in decades. In the current fiscal year, the number of civilian workers will grow by 153,000, to 1.43 million. These are the only jobs Mr. Obama can legitimately claim to have created. Unfortunately, they are subsidized by deficit spending.

Federal positions are not shovel-ready make-work jobs, either. Working for Uncle Sam pays extremely well these days. Government employment used to be a calling, a career in which a sense of fulfillment from public service offset low pay and spartan working conditions. Not so today. According to a study by the Cato Institute, 2008 federal worker pay-and-benefits packages averaged \$119,982. That's more than double the private-sector average of \$59,909.

The ranks of the highest-paid federal workers are growing fast. A report in USA Today indicated massive growth in the number of pre-benefit six-figure federal salaries. For example, the number of people earning \$170,000 or more in the Transportation Department went from one in December 2007 to 1,690 by June 2009. The average above-salary "performance bonus" for federal senior executives in 2008 was \$14,831. We doubt these inflated salaries and awards are buying Americans the best government in history.

In the Defense Department, which is adding the most new workers, the number of civilian employees earning more than \$150,000 jumped from 1,868 in December 2007 to 10,100 in June 2009. Many highly paid Defense Department employees are retired members of the

military who receive full pensions in addition to salary. This "double dipping" is extra costly for taxpayers.

Federal pay keeps growing even as overall private-sector compensation stagnates. In 2009, federal employees received an average pay raise of 3.9 percent, more than twice the 1.5 percent wage-and-benefit increase for private-sector employees - that is, for those who still had jobs. Mr. Obama proposed a 2 percent federal pay increase for fiscal 2010, down from a projected 2.4 percent rise. This was supposed to save approximately \$20 billion, but a zero percent increase would have saved \$120 billion.

A federal pay freeze is a reasonable proposal in times of record budget deficits, especially when federal workers already make much more than their private-sector counterparts. However, this would require the president to make one of those hard choices he likes to talk about but studiously avoids. Feds who think they have a right to regular pay raises should contemplate the hardships of the millions of Americans recently forced to accept 100 percent pay cuts. And a 10 percent cut in the federal work force would save additional billions of dollars and still leave the government larger than it was when Mr. Obama took office. Those bonuses for bureaucrats should end, too.

Cutting the cost of federal salaries is obviously a prudent step to take in tumultuous times, but increasing the federal work force seems to be the only idea Mr. Obama has for increasing employment. His way of inventing jobs depends on borrowing other people's money, and eventually that money will run out.

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