



Number of federal workers making at least \$100,000 tops half-million

Chris Papst

February 4, 2016

With more than two million employees, the federal government is the nation's largest employer. And the number of those workers making more than \$100,000 has topped half-a-million for the first time.

"IT analyst. specialist. Let's see here," said Felipe Gonzalez, as he scrolled through an online list of federal job postings. Gonzalez moved to the DC area eight years ago. In that time, he's had the same private sector job, which he likes. But he's always been enticed to work for the federal government.

"The scheduling. The money. The benefits," stated Gonzalez. "Holidays off. Who wouldn't want that job?"

And many do. The average job posting on USAjobs.gov gets 75 applicants. The jobs are so popular, websites like Indeed, AARP, and Monster provide tips to get hired.

Sandy Harris runs fedjobs.com, which is devoted to helping fed job seekers.

"Historically people are looking for the stability of a job in the government," said Harris.

And the pay can also be good. The I-Team analyzed government data from the Office of Personnel Management and found that last year the number of federal employees making more than \$100,000 topped 500,000 for the first time. That's 25 percent of the entire federal workforce of roughly 2.1 million. In the last 15 years, the number of federal workers making \$100,000 increased from 66,116 to 509,025, a nearly 800 percent increase.

"I think the WJLA investigation shows the federal government is getting extremely top heavy," said Chris Edwards, an economist at the CATO Institute, which advocates for limited government.

Digging into the data, we see the biggest jump happened from 2006 to 2009. Edwards says that's due to President George W. Bush, who instituted a new pay system that drove up salaries, which President Barack Obama repealed. Growth has slowed. But the U.S. Bureau of Economic

Analysis found the average federal worker now makes 49 percent more than the average private sector worker. Up from 25 percent, in 1990.

"The federal government has become more and more, sort of an, elite island of highly paid, highly secure jobs," added Edwards. "So, there's really two America's here."

"[Salaries] are too low," rebutted Jacqueline Simon, with the American Federation of Government Employees union.

Simon rejects broad comparisons between the public and private sectors. She says the government needs highly skilled, higher paid workers. She points to a Federal Salary Council study which found the average fed worker makes 35 percent less money than similar jobs in the private sector.

"The only relevant question is what does the private sector, what does state and local government pay for similar jobs," concluded Simon.

This story focused on salaries. When benefits such as retirement and healthcare are included, the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis found the average federal workers make 78 percent more than the average private sector worker - double the 39 percent it was in 1990.