

Civil servants' pay, benefits exceed private-sector counterparts, Cato study finds

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WASHINGTON — After a three-year lull, the war between fiscal conservatives and federal employees and their allies in Congress over whether civil servants are overpaid is heating up again, thanks to a study from the Cato Institute.

The libertarian think tank weighed in this week on the debate over “who makes more: federal or private-sector workers” with 2014 data from the Bureau of Economic Analysis.

It claims that federal employees make on average 78 percent more than their private-sector counterparts. And it is sure to add fuel to the long-standing and acrimonious debate over federal pay and benefits.

“The federal government has become an elite island of secure and high-paid employment, separated from the ocean of average Americans competing in the economy,” writes Chris Edwards, Cato's director of tax policy.

Edwards points to data from BEA, part of the Commerce Department, showing the average federal employee earns about \$119,000 a year compared to his or her private-sector counterpart, who makes \$67,000.

Those numbers include health insurance and other benefits. When those expenses are subtracted, federal civilian workers' average wage comes to \$84,153 compared to \$56,350 for private-sector employees.

He and other conservatives have made similar assessments before, when large budget deficits during the recession led Congress and the Obama administration to impose a three-year freeze on pay raises for federal employees.