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Federal Govt., Employees Get Dismal Marks

By **Jon E. Dougherty** at 11:25 am Eastern

A new survey and a host of related data point to a worsening view towards unionized government workers among the private sector, with more than half of Americans saying federal employees are overpaid and a larger majorities saying that government, in general, is too big.

A new Washington Post survey found that 52 percent of Americans believe government workers are overpaid. Meanwhile, three-quarters said government workers are paid more and receive better benefits than their private-sector counterparts - a view supported by a USA Today survey in March, which found that eight of 10 federal workers earned higher salaries than their private sector counterparts.

"It's a highly educated, largely unionized group whose pay is based on experience and what similar jobs in the private sector fetch," the Washington Post said of the diverse federal work force. "The government says it is hard to compare average public and private salaries, since so many jobs outside government are in low-paying service industries, whereas government workers tend to be more skilled."

Still, the numbers support the critics: USA Today found that, based on Bureau of Labor statistics data, federal workers earned an average of \$67,691 in 2008 "for occupations that exist both in government and the private sector," compared to \$60,046 for the same jobs in the private sector.

"These salary figures do not include the value of health, pension and other benefits, which averaged \$40,785 per federal employee in 2008 vs. \$9,882 per private worker, according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis," USA Today reported.

"The data flip the conventional wisdom on its head," CATO Institute budget analyst Chris Edwards told the paper. "Federal workers make substantially more than private workers, not less, in addition to having a large advantage in benefits."

And a USA Today/Gallup survey released last week found that six in 10 Americans believe the federal government has too much power. In all, 58 percent of respondents believe Uncle Sam is too powerful and doing too many things - the highest percentage of Americans who think so in a decade.

Such data is being used by politicians on the campaign trail as well. Republicans have generally seized on such reports to urge smaller, leaner government during this campaign season, though during the Bush years the federal budget grew by about 30 percent.

Fiscal restraint was on the mind of President Obama Friday. In a speech to black columnists in Washington, he said government agencies will need to develop plans for cutting budgets by 5 percent next fiscal year.

In the meantime, though, federal job growth has remained steady, while the private sector has suffered through near-double-digit unemployment. The Washington Times reported Monday that while most other major metropolitan areas have been shedding jobs all year, Washington, D.C., has been a bastion of job growth.

"A \$700 billion bank bailout and \$814 billion economic stimulus bill helped push the federal deficit to unprecedented levels of more than \$1.3 trillion in the past two years, and a disproportionate share of that tidal wave of money was shed up right back in Washington," Patrice Hill wrote in a column.

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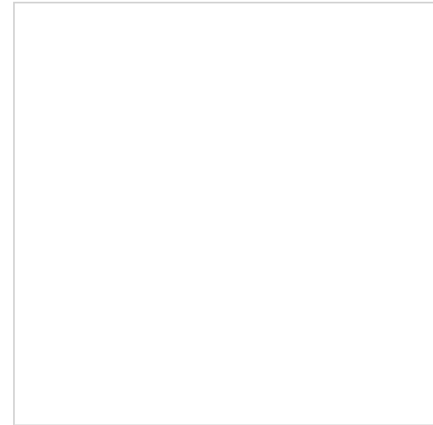
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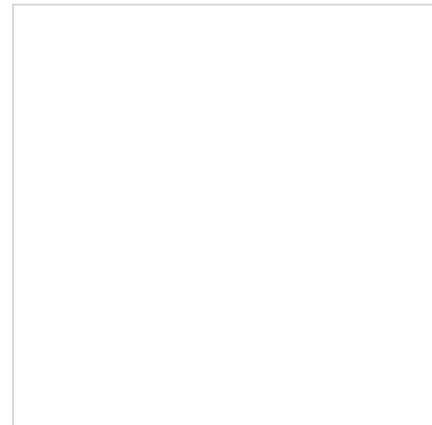
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