

# The Washington Times

## Obama Budget Calls for Largest Federal Civilian Workforce Since Cold War

By S.A. Miller and Stephan Dinan

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(Washington Times) - The federal civilian workforce will reach its highest level since the end of the Cold War under the budget President Obama submitted to Congress on Monday, surging by more than 100,000 employees over the next two years as he tries to restock agencies he says have been decimated by GOP-led cuts.

All told, Mr. Obama will have added more than 160,000 civilian workers to the executive branch since he took office, putting him on pace to top President George W. Bush for the biggest expansion in modern political history. When civilians at the Department of Defense are discounted, Mr. Obama is already the leader, with 124,000 jobs added in his first seven years.

The Department of the Treasury — home to the embattled IRS — would see an additional 9,400 workers, or nearly a 10 percent increase, as Mr. Obama seeks to reconstitute a tax agency the GOP has marked for retribution in the wake of the tea party-targeting scandal.

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The VA’s workforce would grow by even more — 11,600, according to figures submitted along with the budget — as Mr. Obama works to rebuild the department in the wake of last year’s waitlist scandal.

“The president has always shown a penchant for increasing the size of government and increasing the reach of government,” said House Committee on the Budget Chairman Tom Price, Georgia Republican. “It’s hard to have a government that isn’t as regulatory and prescriptive as the president wants without having more people.”

Mr. Obama’s budget would restore many of the personnel trims from sequestration, the across-the-board cuts he and Congress agreed to several years ago as a way of reducing the deficit. But Mr. Obama is now eager to reverse sequestration, saying the economy is expanding, so it’s time to raise taxes and spend more on investments the country needs.

Rep. Jose E. Serrano, New York Democrat, agreed, saying the additional workers are needed because “a lot of the agencies have been cut to the bone.”

“There are big needs now, different needs for all the agencies,” he said. “I don’t have a problem with that.”

Of the main federal departments, only the Defense Department will see a drop in its civilian employees in 2016. The Department of Education will expand by more than 7 percent, while the Department of Labor will grow by more than 4 percent. Some independent regulators will grow too, with the Securities and Exchange Commission leaping 11.4 percent to nearly 5,000 workers on staff.

In his budget, Mr. Obama defended his increases and the high pay federal workers collect, saying they tend to be concentrated in higher-skilled jobs requiring more education and are also in more urban areas with higher costs of living.

Mr. Obama also said his administration has made progress in hiring veterans for federal jobs, with veterans now making up 31 percent of all new hires by 2013. By comparison, veterans are about 6 percent of the private sector nonfarm workforce.

The jump in workers didn’t satisfy the American Federation of Government Employees, the largest federal employee union, with 670,000 members, which said it wanted to see a bigger pay hike than the 1.3 percent pay raise Mr. Obama proposed for workers.

“Let’s be real — a 1.3 percent pay raise will be eaten up by higher costs for groceries, health care and other essentials [just] like [for] other middle-class workers,” said AFGE President J. David Cox Sr.

Mr. Obama has grown the workforce faster than any time in the last 35 years, dating to President Reagan’s term.

Reagan added just 20,000 civilian workers during his eight years in office, with most of those coming at the Pentagon. Indeed, he cut 56,000 civilian employees from nondefense jobs. President George H.W. Bush added 10,000 employees, and President Clinton set the record for cuts, reducing the civilian workforce by 325,000 over his eight years, with 272,000 of those coming at the Pentagon.

President George W. Bush reversed the trend, adding 122,000 non-Pentagon civilian workers and 43,000 civilians at the Defense Department.

Overall, the cost of the federal civilian workforce will reach \$276 billion in 2016, with \$191.6 billion of that coming in salaries and the rest in the generous benefits package that federal workers collect. Combined, it amounts to a 3.6 percent increase in spending on federal employees, the budget projects.

John Koskinen, commissioner of the IRS, defended the leap in employees at his agency, saying 3,000 of the new workers are destined to man help desk phones to answer taxpayers' questions next year. He said that would enable his agency to answer 80 percent of phone calls, compared to the 50 percent they anticipate being able to handle this year.

The jump in the size of the IRS is likely to spark a fight with Congress, however. Republicans have been punishing the agency with cuts over the last couple of years.

“At the point we are at right now, federal workers, like [those] at the IRS, are involved in things that the American people don't want them to be involved in, like targeting American citizens. We've got a wealth of individuals who are doing the kind of things that the American people don't think are necessary. So what we need to do is right-size government, get it efficient and effective and grow and help the economy as opposed to what the president is proposing.”

Chris Edwards, director of tax policy at the Cato Institute and editor of [DownsizingGovernment.org](http://DownsizingGovernment.org), said federal workers haven't kept up with productivity gains in the private sector.

“Why can't they get more productive all the time — do more with less?” he said. “There's an argument that the government workforce should be shrinking over time.”