



Knoxville News Sentinel

- By [Michael Collins](#)
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WASHINGTON — U.S. Rep. John J. Duncan Jr. is urging the congressional "super committee" looking for ways to lower the federal deficit to seriously consider reducing the number of federal employees eligible for early retirement.

The Knoxville Republican sent a letter to the panel this week and argued that the government could save billions of dollars by prohibiting all new federal workers from drawing federal pensions any earlier than age 62.

"There are many thousands of federal employees who are in their 50s or even in their late 40s," Duncan wrote. "As much as American lifespans have increased, we simply cannot afford to allow people to draw federal pensions at such young ages."

The congressman stressed that he is not suggesting changing the retirement rules for anyone currently employed by the federal government.

"But what we need to start doing — and we need to start doing it sooner than later — we need to tell the new people coming in that we can't give them as lucrative retirements as in the past," Duncan said in an interview.

In 2009, the average age for federal retirees was 58.9, according to the U.S. Office of Personnel Management. But under voluntary early retirement, an employee with 20 or more years of service can retire as early as age 50.

"The main concern," Duncan said in the interview, "is we simply can't afford it. We're broke. And we're not only broke, we're horrendously in debt. Already, our national debt is about \$14.5 trillion, but even under the most conservative plans out there, it's going to go to \$16 trillion to \$17 trillion in the next three to four years."

In the past, Duncan said, early retirement has been justified because federal pay has been much lower than the private sector.

But a study last year by the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, found that compensation of federal employees rose much faster than compensation of private-sector employees over the past decade. As a consequence, the study concluded, the average federal civilian worker now earns twice as much in wages and benefits as the average worker in the private sector.

The super committee, created as part of a compromise deal last August to raise the nation's debt limit, is charged with coming up with \$1.5 trillion in deficit cuts over 10 years. The 12-member panel — six Democrats and six Republicans — is due to offer its recommendations before Thanksgiving.

Duncan said he doesn't expect the super committee to reduce eligibility for early retirement because, given the panel's 6-6 partisan split, it will be difficult to reach a consensus on anything that could be controversial.

But, "I don't think it will be considered controversial in the future," he said, "because with each passing year, people are going to realize that we don't have any choice about this."



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