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Business in The Beltway

Covering the intersection of money and politics

Bureaucrats Vs. Taxpayers

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Daniel J. MitchellBio | Email

Dan Mitchell is a Senior Fellow at the Washington-based Cato Institute, a free-market think tank.

The political process often resembles an unseemly racket as politicians take money from people who earn it and give it to another group in exchange for campaign cash and political support. The modern bureaucracy is a good example. Government workers have now become a cosseted elite, with generous pay, extravagant benefits, lavish pensions, and ironclad job security. In exchange for this privileged status, they reward the politicians with millions of dollars of support and a host of in-kind contributions. I have documented many of these outrages in my "Taxpayers vs. Bureaucrats" series at the International Liberty blog. Well, now we have a video detailing how the government workforce has morphed into a fiscal nightmare for taxpayers.

There are three things in the video that deserve special emphasis. First, bureaucrats are vastly overpaid. The government data cited in the video show that total compensation for the federal civil service is twice as high, on average, as it is for workers in the productive sector of the economy. There are some bureaucrats who deserve above-average pay, such as scientists dealing with nuclear weapons, but it is outrageous that the average drone in the federal bureaucracy is getting twice as much compensation as the taxpayers (serfs) who pay their salaries.

Second, this mini-documentary debunks the silly argument (put forth by government employee unions, of course) that bureaucrats are underpaid compared to the private sector. The Department of Labor has data looking at voluntary departure rates by profession. If government workers were being underpaid, you would expect them to be more likely to leave their jobs in order to take new positions in the (supposedly higher paid) private sector. Instead, the video reveals that people in the private sector are six times more likely to switch jobs than federal bureaucrats.

Third, the video concludes with the essential point that most federal bureaucrats should be paid nothing because they work for departments and agencies that should not exist.

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