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# the agenda

WITH REIHAN SALAM

## Monday, August 24, 2009

### Chris Edwards on Federal Pay

Chris Edwards at the Cato Institute highlights [the wages of federal workers](#):

The George W. Bush years were very lucrative for federal workers. In 2000, the average compensation (wages and benefits) of federal workers was 66 percent higher than the average compensation in the U.S. private sector. The new data show that average federal compensation is now more than double the average in the private sector.

This gap in average compensation is even more pronounced when you factor in state and local workers. Edwards suggests a pay freeze:

Federal wages should be frozen for a period of years, at least until the private-sector economy has recovered and average workers start seeing some wage gains of their own. At the same time, gold-plated federal benefit packages should be scaled back as unaffordable given today's massive budget deficits. There are many qualitative benefits of government work—such as [extremely high job security](#)—so taxpayers should not have to pay for such lavish government pay packages.

I tend to think that a freeze for all federal workers is too blunt an instrument. Some workers are overpaid while some might still be underpaid, e.g., effective procurement officers who can save the federal government vast sums of money. But his basic point is an important one.

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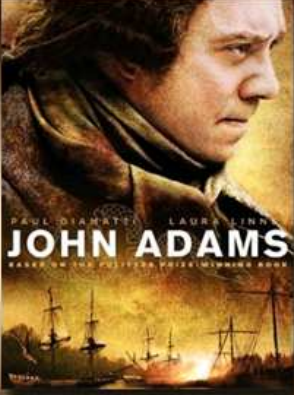
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