



Deficit, fed pay deserve scrutiny

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Some arguments about the direction of the country come with baggage. Still, it is wrong to dismiss them not on their merits but rather because of who made them.

Elsewhere on this page the Joplin Globe compliments the Concord Coalition for trying to get presidential candidates on the record about the escalating federal budget deficit. Though nonpartisan in makeup, the coalition is harshly criticized by some who contend it really is an extension of billionaire Peter G. Peterson and a thinly veiled front for a campaign to cut Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid benefits.

Meanwhile, we recently received a report from the Cato Institute calling attention to a big disparity in how much federal government employees are paid in comparison to those in the private sector. The report is compelling reading but comes with a caveat that causes some to dismiss it: the Cato Institute counts among its founders the conservative billionaire Charles Koch.

Is it too much to ask thoughtful people — and especially the policymakers we elect — to look within each argument for obvious truths? Can we not look past personal distaste for someone who is making these points?

The Globe's editorial, republished here, speaks to the obvious problem with spending money we don't have and with spending it to finance debt rather than on needed social programs. One solution is to work harder to avoid deficit spending. This is true no matter who makes the argument.

The Cato Institute study cites numbers showing "federal employees' pay and benefits were 78 percent higher than those in the private sector." It credits legislated increases in general pay, increases due to the location of positions, expansions in benefits and a growth in the number of higher-paying federal jobs.

Liberal paid time off policies and high job security are some of the other benefits cited.

The study's author concludes: "Policymakers should restrain spending in every federal department and activity. They should pursue further reforms to federal pay packages and better align wages and benefits with private-sector practices."

There is room here for differences of opinion and debate about the seriousness of these problems and what to do about them. But you have got to have the debate.