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Letter: Public debt is a problem, not public employees

By *St. Augustine Record*

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Editor: A recent writer claimed "facts" in USA Today indicate that federal wages and benefits were much higher than the private sector, causing our public debt. These assertions are misleading and need to be addressed.

The statistics used are a national average that does account for pay variations due to hours worked, duties, locality, seniority, skills, experience and overtime. Also, what is "comparable" is debatable because many government jobs have no match in the private sector. According to Federal Times, a Presidential panel recently concluded, "federal employees earn 22 percent less than private sector comparisons."

The statistics are based on what is reported. Bonuses, stock options, expense accounts, and other forms of compensation that private employees receive were not included. Even USA Today admitted that "Federal jobs have more limited salary ranges than private-sector jobs, some of which have million-dollar payouts."

USA Today cites the Cato Institute, an organization founded by an oil executive and funded, in part, by big oil. One of its core principles is limited government and lowering pay is one way to do that.

I agree the public debt is a serious problem. However, the bulk of the debt is due to Social Security, Medicare, interest on the debt, and defense spending. Reducing pay and benefits earned by public employees and retirees will have little impact on the overall debt. What it will do is undermine the government's ability to attract and retain high quality employees to serve the public.

Most public employees are dedicated, hard working and loyal. They provide valuable services every day. Now, more than ever, we need a highly skilled and motivated public workforce. It was the reckless behavior of Wall Street, BP and others motivated by greed and self interest that got us into this mess, not public employees.

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