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Charleston Daily Mail (West Virginia)

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**Your views****SECTION:** EDITORIAL; Pg. P5A**LENGTH:** 600 words

Jealousy spurs critics

of government pay

The Daily Mail's Aug. 13 editorial concerning government benefits being out of line certainly raised my eyebrows.

As a retired federal employee with more than 37 years of service, I remember well how Presidents Reagan, Bush I, Clinton and Bush II established pay commissions to study the disparity between federal salaries and private-sector salaries, determining that like or very similar jobs in the private sector received from 20 to 40 percent higher salaries than those afforded federal employees.

They also determined that benefits between the two groups were roughly similar.

The commissions were set up as an excuse for not making a serious effort to equalize benefits with the private sector. Employees were promised that the government recognized this inequality and would do something about it if the economy improved.

When did all this change? Perhaps when the economy began to look less promising for the private sector, there began to be some jealousy concerning the relative stability of federal jobs.

The editorial stated that "it is beyond dispute that the federal fringe benefit package is four times better than that of the fringe benefits in the private sector."

However, there never seems to be a direct comparison of the positions involved.

Indeed, the USA Today article that was cited did not compare pay and compensation between the private sector and the federal government. The federal workforce is, by and large, the most educated and skilled workforce in the nation.

Those in highly skilled or technical positions in the private sector are always well paid, with significant fringe benefits offered to entice them to accept and remain in such positions.

The editorial states that health insurance for federal workers is a big part of the difference in fringe benefits, but fails to recognize that federal employees generally pay 20 percent or more of these insurance costs, just as most private sector employees do.

A comment was also made that public employees are guaranteed a certain percentage of pay as a pension.

Federal retirees not only pay a higher percentage of their salaries toward their retirement benefits, but must also pay an additional percentage for any potential survivor benefits, unlike their private-sector counterparts who receive Social Security benefits.

The author of the editorial recited the propaganda of the **Cato Institute**, an ultra-conservative think tank established to significantly reduce the federal government, rather than properly researching the opinion piece.

Robert L. Hardesty

Charleston

Hardesty is president of the W.Va. Federation of National Active and Retired Federal Employees.

Thank you for youth science camp

I thank the people of West Virginia for their support of the National Youth Science Camp, which I attended this summer. This life-changing experience is worth much greater attention than it receives.

Every morning I woke up among the country's - no the world's - best and brightest students, but we were not competing for grades. Yes, we were there to learn, but we learned in an environment of exploration, collaboration and openness.

From Frisbee physics - which are surprisingly complex - to dissecting, we all found ourselves pushed a bit outside of our comfort zones, yet completely thrilled by the experience.

I cannot adequately express my thanks for the camp, the staff members who work there, and the contributors who made my 25-day stay in West Virginia possible.

The National Youth Science Camp is a rare gem for the state of West Virginia and for the nation.

Ethan Green

Springfield, Tenn.

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