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EDITORIALS

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Who is working for whom here?

Taxpayers are funding benefits they do not themselves enjoy

THE newspaper USA Today studied the federal compensation system and compared what taxpayers pay their employees to how much private industry pays. In eight of the 10 occupations that could be compared, the government employees were paid a good deal more.

The average annual pay for those 10 occupations was \$67,691 in 2008. That compared to an average of \$60,046 in the private sector.

But those figures reflect only pay rates. They do not reflect the total cost of compensation.

"These salary figure do not include the value of health, pension and other benefits, which averaged \$40,785 per federal employee in 2008 vs. \$9,882 per private worker," according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis.

Think about it. Taxpayers are spending \$108,476 a year, on average, for government employees the private sector pays just \$69,928 a year.

Many taxpayers undoubtedly resent that nearly \$40,000-a-year gap in compensation, especially considering the job security that government employees enjoy under Civil Service.

In all, the federal government spent \$224 billion in 2008 on wages and benefit for 2 million workers.

"The data flip the conventional wisdom on its head," Chris Edwards of the libertarian Cato Institute told the newspaper. "Federal workers make substantially more than private workers, not less, in addition to having a larger advantage in benefits."

Colleen Kelley, president of the National Treasury Employees Union, disagreed. She said the work conducted by federal accountants, for example, is more complex and requires more skill than the work done by accountants in the private sector.

That will be news to accountants across the land. The gap between government pay and benefits and private-sector pay and benefits is indefensible.

It must be changed, lest it fuel more tax resistance.

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