



## Federal Pay Gravy Train

July 9, 2010

by Mike Causey

Federal workers are grossly overpaid compared to people who toil in the private sector. The debate, as someone once said, is over! Let's stop with all this proof stuff.

We know civil servants are living large because...

USA Today has reported it, the Wall Street Journal has documented it, The Washington Times agrees it is true and Cato Institute did a lengthy report on the subject. More recently the [Cato Institute](#) said feds enjoy a 30 to 40 percent advantage in pay and benefits over private sector workers.

Nobody cooked the books. The numbers work. But...

Are the experts comparing apples to oranges?

Unless you are a government employee, or work for a federal-postal union or have a death wish, defending federal civil servants (especially in this economy) is like bringing a knife to a gunfight. You may get out without injury, but probably not.

Some government workers agree that they are better off than their private sector counterparts. Others say this is a recent thing caused by the economic downturn. During good times, they say, folks who didn't work for the government feasted.

Data collected by the Bureau of Labor Statics shows that there is a double-digit gap (around 22 percent on average) between federal salaries and pay for similar jobs outside government. The 1990 federal pay law was supposed to close that gap through a series of annual catchup raises for feds.

President Clinton refused to give federal workers the full amount of the annual catchup raises called for by the 1990 law. Congress typically overrode him, but feds rarely got the full amount of their annual catchup raise. He said no pay comparison is complete or accurate unless it also compares the value of fringe (retirement, health insurance, vacation, holidays) benefits available to federal and nonfederal workers. President Bush (and now President Obama) continued the practice of recommending smaller raises for feds.

People who argue that feds are not bloated bureaucrats say the pay differentials are because the government does things the private sector doesn't. That federal workers are better educated (43 percent with B.A.s compared to 28 percent in the private sector) than the national labor force. That feds are

older (average age 45 compared to 40) and have been on the job longer---15 years or more for 60 percent of the workforce.

And Uncle Sam, with few exceptions, doesn't do retail. Or employ burger-flippers or run mom and pop stores. Not that there's anything wrong with that!

Here's how Marc, a retired fed in Florida put it:

- "...(F)ederal pay and benefits were covered in an op-ed article in USA Today on July 7. The author, of the article was interviewed by Larry Kudlow on CNBC. It is amazing...federal pay and benefits are too high, but when the BP well blew up, the detractors were the first to call for the feds, whose pay they want to cut, to intervene and take control to fix it. And when we went to war in Iraq and Afghanistan, what about the feds that supported and continue to support those efforts?"

So maybe federal workers are paid more.

And maybe there is a reason for that.

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### **Nearly Useless Factoid**

by [Vyomika Jairam](#)

Grover Cleveland's first present to his future wife Frances was a [baby carriage](#). He was 27, she was a few days old. When she was 11, her father died, and Cleveland stepped in as a surrogate father (though he never officially adopted her) Ten years later, he married her.

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[back](#)