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Why Not Work for the Government? Federal Workers Make Twice As Much

Posted April 29th, 2010 at 4:00pm in [Enterprise and Free Markets](#) with [8](#) comments  [Print This Post](#)

[The Washington Examiner](#) today exposes a dirty little secret about Washington bureaucrats: Federal employees are bringing home twice as much pay as the average private-sector worker.

Data compiled by the Commerce Department's Bureau of Economic Analysis reveals the extent of the pay gap between federal and private workers. As of 2008, the average federal salary was \$119,982, compared with \$59,909 for the average private sector employee. In other words, the average federal bureaucrat makes twice as much as the average working taxpayer. Add the value of benefits like health care and pensions, and the gap grows even bigger. The average federal employee's benefits add \$40,785 to his annual total compensation, whereas the average working taxpayer's benefits increase his total compensation by only \$9,881. In other words, federal workers are paid on average salaries that are twice as generous as those in the private sector, and they receive benefits that are four times greater.

Earlier this year, Heritage's James Sherk [noted that government workers brought home a 2.4 percent raise](#), while private-sector employees saw their salary increase by half that amount. Private businesses must adapt to the economic climate, but government feels no such pressure. Or, as Sherk wrote, "Government employees can continue getting raises no matter the health of the overall economy, so long as taxes keep coming in."

The Cato Institute's Chris Edwards [attributes the growth in compensation](#) to the increasing influence of public-sector unions, including at the state and local level. The consequences are troubling for America's fiscal future.

Make no mistake, this is a deliberate strategy on the part of liberals to grow our dependence on government. Look no further than the recently enacted Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act, which [cut private lenders out of the picture](#) in favor of the government.

It's becoming increasingly clear the [big winners in the Obama economy](#) are government unions.

Tags: [government unions](#), [public sector unions](#), [Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act](#), [washington examiner](#)



Author: [Rob Bluey](#)

8 Responses to "Why Not Work for the Government? Federal Workers Make Twice As Much"

1. Billie on April 29th, 2010 at [4:00pm](#) said:

totally appreciate you writing what they "make" cause they sure don't "earn" it. Its government in it's entirety. When obama says "we all need to sacrifice" he's addressing those of independent living at all incomes, but not ALL PEOPLE.

since the president has already made up his mind on who will sacrifice and who will not, he has the duty to be specific in his address when referring to "we."

I'm allergic to corruption, it would kill me to work for it...

2. Billie on April 29th, 2010 at [4:00pm](#) said:

sounds like a job for a government psyche!?

3. J Evans, Tarpon Springs on April 29th, 2010 at [4:00pm](#) said:

Not all Federal Employees make 100,000+ a year. That is only upper management. Postal workers are preceived to be making bookoo bucks but the nonmanagerial employees average 50-60k annually. Those that make more are working alot of overtime with they can. So please don't lump us in with management

4. Brad, Detroit, MI on April 29th, 2010 at [4:00pm](#) said:

It said average. And \$50-\$60K for working at the post office seems pretty damn generous to me. Tell the poor carpenter or electrician that is struggling to survive that \$50 or \$60K per year is not much and you are likely to start a fight. Also, I don't know many folks in my sector (salaried automotive) that make a dime of overtime pay or have received a raise in the last 4 to 5 years.

5. Bill – Forney, TX on April 29th, 2010 at [4:00pm](#) said:

Are the government workers subject to the ObamaCare tax on cadillac health plans since theirs must be above the \$25K threshold?

6. Dennis Social Circle Ga. on April 29th, 2010 at [4:00pm](#) said:

The unions of federal employees do not care, they have unlimited funding, why do you think the unions gave \$60 million to obama to get him elected. Now he owes and we the tax payer will pay.

7. Drew Page, IL on April 29th, 2010 at [4:00pm](#) said:

To J. Evans in Tarpon springs, FL — I'm not against postal workers making a decent living, but that \$50,000 or \$60,000 a year isn't the sum total of comp.

The pension plan for postal workers is far more generous that a Social Security pension. Further, health insurance plans for postal workers are far more generous than those available to most employees working in the private sector and those richer benefits will be exempt from the "cadillac" plan taxes Mr. Obama plans to charge. Most employees retiring from the private sector have no employer sponsored health insurance plans, but must rely on Medicare.

I don't begrudge you your salary or your benefits, but if you are going to quote them for comparison purposes, quote the whole package.

8. Wildcat from Dallastown, PA on April 29th, 2010 at [4:00pm](#) said:

It is difficult to see the picture without a clearer historical perspective. Going back only one or two years is in my view rather inadequate to measure the distinct differences in government service (GS) employees pay and benefits versus than those working in the private sector.

While I have some experience in dealing workers considered working for a branch of the federal government, DOD and more specifically, Department of the Army over the last 30+ years I can definitely add some cogent thoughts to this assessment.

My first contact with this category of government worker consisted primarily of civilian secretaries for field grade commanders and a handful of German citizens who worked at the community headquarters for the small base I was stationed at. The secretaries were usually in the pay grade of GS-4 or GS-5 at the beginning of their service and had incremental raises labeled as "step raises" that occurred periodically similar to time in service raises. If they were exceptionally efficient on a consistent basis they could be eligible for a performance bonus but not any additional raise unless promoted. The German citizens may have been paid differently and perhaps not as actual government service employees but were paid appropriately for their administrative and language translation knowledge, skills and abilities.

Later, in my first command I had a civilian secretary work for me who was very good at the multitude of tasks she had to perform for me to deal with the 350+ officers generally spread across the four primary combat arms branches, the routinely more complicated reserve component officers and a nominal number of officers spread across the remaining combat and combat service support branches. She had to coordinate and take action on all facets of what at that time a normal

personnel action center did for a battalion. She was a GS-4, step unknown who I was able to justify bonuses for during my tenure in command. I'm not confident on the amount of her salary base but I want to say it was in the low to mid teens somewhere between \$13K and \$16K. Even with those merit or performance bonuses she was not exactly overpaid for all the tasks she was exceptionally good at without fail.

I interacted with several GS employees at a much greater range of responsibilities as well as a contractor's employee at a future assignment in a different command. There I once again had a GS-4 secretary who performed a wide range of administrative duties thereby allowing the company First Sergeant and myself more flexibility to perform our missions. The next echelon up is where the others were at that I had periodic contact with and they served in the GS pay ranges of GS-5 thru GS-9. They were not overly compensated for their efforts either and in all aforementioned cases overtime was strictly forbidden unless approved about two echelons above my military grade. The point many may not be aware of is that certain specific GS employees were required to have advanced civilian degrees and a nominal number of years of relevant experience to even be considered for such a position. Some of which appeared to have traded a lesser pay and lesser ability for upward mobility than their private sector peers for consistency of employment. Others made that trade for adequate or perhaps better pay for less measureable work to be performed (or less aggravating than working with high school administrators, students and their parents). It should be noted that the amount of productivity and quality of their work was evaluated by a field grade military officer who either drove them hard to produce or was apathetic about their output. Some of those GS employees got whipped into producing (or left voluntarily or otherwise) while others got a relatively cushy ride.

Having performed well above expectations I was involuntarily extended and transferred to another unit one level up and now got to work with and supervise several of these GS employees. Just like anywhere else their abilities ranged from adequate to exceptional. Having been well trained and outperformed 95%+ of my peers I was able to use that training and experience with my leadership style to get these GS employees to work well as a TEAM, unlike most of the other like sized units did. In fact, after only serving there for about six months I took over the next higher officer's position while retaining mine and now had responsibility for all the GS employees on the staff. I built teamwork among them and was fortunate enough to have a few officers attached who helped me train and develop those who needed to eliminate their weaknesses and develop strengths. That was in the late 1980's and if I remember correctly a GS-9's base pay was about \$34K or \$36K per year. They earned their pay but their morale was exceptionally high. My subsequent assignment took me back to what most civilians know as the Army albeit on a Corps staff in a unique activity away from the headquarters. Initially I had two contractors working for me along with a special ten person team of NCO's. Unfortunately I had a Department of the Army (DAC) GS-12 as a supervisor who was not even remotely adequate for serving in that position. Due to routine staff officer shuffling I became a simulations officer and subsequently the deputy director of that activity. In the latter role I interacted with a whole host of DAC's from GS-5 thru GM-14. "GM" translates to a more senior management role as a GS employee.

Prior to my arrival the GS-12 director had been investigated for accepting a bribe from a defense contractor [during a contract selection process] for which he received a "temporary" letter of reprimand [from his supervisor, a COL, O-6] even though his official DAC personnel performance reports have no documentation of having receiving that reprimand and he was not removed from his position for his lack of integrity etc. What happened was the deputy director had to perform his (the director's) contracting officer representative (COR) duties. I had already served as the COTR (contracting officer's technical representative) for one of the other simulation teams but now had to do a significant part of his job for the Army while he simply got fewer duties with the same pay! I also got to interact with countless GS employees ranging from security managers to budget and resource managers. Excluding my GS-12 supervisor the remaining GS employees appeared to me to be knowledgeable and capable employees who efficiently performed their assigned tasks.

After ETS'ing from the military under the so-called "peace dividend" without a bonafide military retirement I found it virtually impossible to pass thru the screening process of the federal civilian employees office of personnel management (OPM) to even get close to the interview process. Once that application system became automated and was placed on the Internet it was easier to apply (and more affordable) but still limited. Since about 2000 or so the OPM and such offices in the military realm called (CPAC) have implemented such procedures and entry requirements making it almost impossible to get in unless you are a considered a disabled veteran with at least a 10% disability rating.

Some of the issues I ran into included requiring a Master's degree for even a GS-5 entry level position or a Master's degree with a PhD preferred for a GS-9 or GS-11 position, both with some years of documented experience. Even though I supervised these specific specialties of GS employees for one to three years, that was not considered adequate enough for their prerequisite experience to even get an interview. Another officer I served with who got out about the time I did eventually managed to get into the former INS in a special program where you entered as a GS-5 and got promoted two

grades every two years culminating as a GS-12, providing you didn't do anything too stupid. Of course he had a Master's in International Relations and (unlike me) has a 10% disability rating. At one point in the last eight years he was relocated with the INS (which went thru a name change about then) and related they were needing help doing that and asked if I was interested in the same program albeit without federal arrest authority (badge and gun) to perform the identical administrative tasks he has been doing. I completed the enormous application packet that consisted of about 27 pages of forms with most pages being my documented knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA's) and any copies of my DD214, college degree, transcripts etc. I even had him as a personal and professional reference. This time I was interviewed over the phone by a panel of INS administrators and managers (some of which were attorneys). In following up I learned my packet had scored 110 points out of 100 possible and I was one the top interviewee yet I did not get an offer! Unbeknownst to me there were 2 GS-4 or -5 clerks who were working there for about six months to a year who applied that got it because they are required to take current employees first over everyone else regardless of score! So even though I had a top score on my application for employment packet and did exceptionally well on the written test as well as the interview, they had to follow the OPM rules.

Now it just so happens that I know at least one other former military member who also got into the INS doing the same thing but at a different location. Both report the same circumstance relative to work versus pay etc. They are authorized only so much overtime and then they can't work anymore overtime the remainder of the year. They both have very flexible schedules and basically work almost unsupervised. So, they work overtime to the maximum levels from the beginning of the year until they have exhausted their limit and then just work minimum hours. One at least was allowed to and did take his work home so he would "work from home" on case packets while taking the occasional break to prepare dinner etc. So their GS-12 pay at the time would have been maxed out at \$72K but with overtime turned into about \$98K! And what were they doing for all this money? Basically only a part of the same tasks my enlisted E-5 thru E-8 recruiters did when they verified citizenship status by reviewing original documents (like birth certificates, HS diplomas, and SSN cards) these INS GS employees were reviewing various documents and corroborating letters and pictures to support the immigrants claim for U.S. benefits! I wonder why you would need a Master's degree in anything to do that? We had junior NCO's with only a HS diploma who joined the military to cook or shoot weapons or fix vehicles that were then trained in about six weeks to learn an entirely different job including how to review original documents to determine eligibility for enlistment.

Anyway, since then SEIU has infiltrated the various aspects of GS employees and manipulated the negotiating process to obtain pay well beyond performance as well as pay well beyond market value, excessive benefits packages and obscene retirement pay and benefits for which every taxpayer is burdened with.

We need a genuine leader in the WH that would use the former program, analysis and evaluation methodology (now known as Six Sigma) to evaluate all federal government employee filled organization to determine exactly where to cut either people and or pay and benefits to align needs with market value to obtain the best value for the American taxpayer.
