



Federal pay ahead of private industry

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Enlarge By Melissa Golden, Getty Images

Federal pay has become a hot political issue in recent months because of concerns over the federal budget deficit and recession-battered wages in the private sector.

By Dennis Cauchon, USA TODAY

Federal employees earn higher average salaries than private-sector workers in more than eight out of 10 occupations, a USA TODAY analysis of federal data finds.

Accountants, nurses, chemists, surveyors, cooks, clerks and janitors are among the wide range of jobs that get paid more on average in the federal government than in the private sector.

Overall, federal workers earned an average salary of \$67,691 in 2008 for occupations that exist both in government and the private sector, according to Bureau of Labor Statistics data. The average pay for the same mix of jobs in the private sector was \$60,046 in 2008, the most recent data available.

CHART: Federal salaries compared to private-sector

These salary figures 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.

Federal pay has become a hot political issue in recent months because of concerns over the federal budget deficit and recession-battered wages in the private sector.

Sen. Scott Brown, R-Mass., made federal pay an issue in his successful campaign to fill Edward Kennedy's seat and is fighting for a pay freeze.

The federal government spends about \$125 billion annually on compensation for about 2 million civilian employees.

"The data flip the conventional wisdom on its head," says Cato Institute budget analyst Chris Edwards, a critic of federal pay policy. "Federal workers make substantially more than private workers, not less, in addition to having a large advantage in benefits."

PAYCHECK

The typical federal worker is paid 20% more than a private-sector worker in the same occupation. Median annual salary:

Federal	Private	Difference
\$66,591	\$55,500	\$11,091

Sources: Bureau of Labor statistics, USA TODAY analysis

But National Treasury Employees Union President Colleen Kelley says the comparison is faulty because it "compares apples and oranges." Federal accountants, for example, perform work that has more complexity and requires more skill than accounting work in the private sector, she says.

"When you look at the actual duties, you see that very few federal jobs align with those in the private sector," she says. She says federal employees are paid an average of 26% less than non-federal workers doing comparable work.

Office of Personnel Management spokeswoman Sedelta Verble, says higher pay also reflects the longevity and older age of federal workers.

USA TODAY used Bureau of Labor Statistics data to compare salaries in every federal job that had a private-sector equivalent. For example, the federal government's 57,000 registered nurses — working for the Veterans Administration and elsewhere — were paid an average of \$74,460 a year, \$10,680 more than the average for private-sector nurses.

The BLS reports that 216 occupations covering 1.1 million federal workers exist in both the federal government and the private sector. An additional 124 federal occupations covering 750,000 employees — air-traffic controllers, tax collectors and others — did not have direct equivalents, according to the BLS.

Federal jobs have more limited salary ranges than private-sector jobs, some of which have million-dollar

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Key findings:

• **Federal.** The federal pay premium cut across all job categories — white-collar, blue-collar, management, professional, technical and low-skill. In all, 180 jobs paid better average salaries in the federal government; 36 paid better in the private sector.

• **Private.** The private sector paid more on average in a select group of high-skill occupations, including lawyers, veterinarians and airline pilots. The government's 5,200 computer research scientists made an average of \$95,190, about \$10,000 less than the average in the corporate world.

• **State and local.** State government employees had an average salary of \$47,231 in 2008, about 5% less than comparable jobs in the private sector. City and county workers earned an average of \$43,589, about 2% more than private workers in similar jobs. State and local workers have higher total compensation than private workers when the value of benefits is included.

Job comparison

Average federal salaries exceed average private-sector pay in 83% of comparable occupations. A sampling of average annual salaries in 2008, the most recent data:

Job	Federal	Private	Difference
Airline pilot, copilot, flight engineer	\$93,690	\$120,012	-\$26,322
Broadcast technician	\$90,310	\$49,265	\$41,045
Budget analyst	\$73,140	\$65,532	\$7,608
Chemist	\$98,060	\$72,120	\$25,940
Civil engineer	\$85,970	\$76,184	\$9,786
Clergy	\$70,460	\$39,247	\$31,213
Computer, information systems manager	\$122,020	\$115,705	\$6,315
Computer support specialist	\$45,830	\$54,875	-\$9,045
Cook	\$38,400	\$23,279	\$15,121
Crane, tower operator	\$54,900	\$44,044	\$10,856
Dental assistant	\$36,170	\$32,069	\$4,101
Economist	\$101,020	\$91,065	\$9,955
Editors	\$42,210	\$54,803	-\$12,593
Electrical engineer	\$86,400	\$84,653	\$1,747
Financial analysts	\$87,400	\$81,232	\$6,168
Graphic designer	\$70,820	\$46,565	\$24,255
Highway maintenance worker	\$42,720	\$31,376	\$11,344
Janitor	\$30,110	\$24,188	\$5,922
Landscape architects	\$80,830	\$58,380	\$22,450
Laundry, dry-cleaning worker	\$33,100	\$19,945	\$13,155
Lawyer	\$123,660	\$126,763	-\$3,103
Librarian	\$76,110	\$63,284	\$12,826
Locomotive engineer	\$48,440	\$63,125	-\$14,685
Machinist	\$51,530	\$44,315	\$7,215
Mechanical engineer	\$88,690	\$77,554	\$11,136
Office clerk	\$34,260	\$29,863	\$4,397
Optometrist	\$61,530	\$106,665	-\$45,135
Paralegals	\$60,340	\$48,890	\$11,450
Pest control worker	\$48,670	\$33,675	\$14,995
Physicians, surgeons	\$176,050	\$177,102	-\$1,052
Physician assistant	\$77,770	\$87,783	-\$10,013
Procurement clerk	\$40,640	\$34,082	\$6,558
Public relations manager	\$132,410	\$88,241	\$44,169
Recreation worker	\$43,630	\$21,671	\$21,959
Registered nurse	\$74,460	\$63,780	\$10,680
Respiratory therapist	\$46,740	\$50,443	-\$3,703
Secretary	\$44,500	\$33,829	\$10,671
Sheet metal worker	\$49,700	\$43,725	\$5,975
Statistician	\$88,520	\$78,065	\$10,455
Surveyor	\$78,710	\$67,336	\$11,374

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TOUGHDAYS (33 friends, send message) wrote: 1m ago
How much cheaper can these jobs be done if we sent them to India or China? Hey, that is the governments polociys for the private sector, why can't we do it for government jobs?

Yes, the fed should have to comply with the same cost efficiencies that the private sector does, ie. costs have to be no more than revenue. Especially since it's the private sector that pays them. Every year the fed goes deeper in the hole, it goes on the taxpayer's tab.

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I have zero complaints.

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No wonder this administration can't see straight!!

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Defeat Communism

Defeat Obama

Wish to hell there was some way to defeat IGNORANCE, STUPIDITY AND LIES -

+++++

There is: DEFEAT OBAMA



sandcreekbeaver (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 1m ago

This is disgusting. Why are we providing incentives to become a government worker by paying more than a private sector job? Get these pigs off the public dole.

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Jameseddie (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 2m ago

Its also interesting to note that the private sector has shrunk during this recession while the public sector has actually GROWN!! You cant have public sector growth without a corresponding growth in the private sector since private sector jobs create the money (as in TAXES) that fund the public sector. This dichotomy cannot continue or else the US will be bankrupt.

And all govt workers with your grandiose benefits - dont tell us private sector workers your job is more difficult than ours and therefore justifies higher wages. I guarantee you we work longer hours, have less benefits (as this article clearly shows), have NO GUARANTEE we wont be fired or our company will be out of business for a variety of reasons. You have NO COMPETITION or incentive to do anything better. How do I know that - well, lets see, look at the bankrupt USPS, Amtrak, Medicare, Social Security, and anything else touched by the Fed Govt including a lousy school system.

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madenoughyet (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 2m ago

This wouldn't bother me so much if we actually got performance, efficiency, and results from these people that are overpaid. Instead we get complacency, apathy, unaccountability, and a sense of entitlement. I'm sure there are a minority of government workers that really are well intending people, but are held back or handcuffed by beauracracy and poor leadership, and to those people, my apologies, but the majority of these people are exactly what I state above. I'd say let's reduce government spending with a 15-20% paycut for these people right now!

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Pathora07 (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 2m ago

TOUGH DAYS (33 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 1m ago
How much cheaper can these jobs be done if we sent them to India or China? Hey, that is the governments polociys for the private sector, why can't we do it for government jobs?
**

What about the illegals?

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MidClassCanibal (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 2m ago

Wow. Let's turn on each other rather than the people who have been eroding our way of life. Over the course of the last 30 years, top executive compensation has become a larger and larger share of the company pay-out pool. And how has this happened? Why, by raiding the money from the average workers.

Think about this: If you went to work for a company in the 1980s, and if you did a decent job, and the company kept you one, and if the company gave you standard cost of living increases and merit increases you deserved, and if you were not "right-sized" out of your job, you would be making far more than government employees do at this time. In short, if companies treated their workers at the same standard they were treated in the '40s, '50s, '60s, and most of the '70s, we would all be better off than government employees. But, that would mean that board members and top executives would have to be content with just a small fortune, and they could only fly first class. And they would join the ranks of the second-homeless. So, we can't get mad at the very people who have been chipping away at the middle class.

No, we have to turn on each other. When we see an article such as this, we get mad at our counterparts in government service, not at the people who have eroded our way of life. We start to envy people ON WELFARE, for goodness sake! We have turned into petty people who are cannibalizing our own instead doing something about the people who are actually attacking us.

It's just sickening.

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Mike1947 (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 2m ago

This is not complicated. In good economic times, private sector jobs thrive and people largely ignore or pity government employees. In times like the present economic malestrom, private sector jobs suffer and people resent the comparatively insulated government employee compensation. Freezing government pay may be popular with non-government employees (i.e., feels good/misery

loves company); but, the impact on deficit spending would be minimal compared to much of the pork that relentlessly flows out of Washington. Bringing home the bacon to the home district is good for reelection. Government jobs historically pay less than private sector jobs; but, benefits trend higher in value, salaries are not nearly as vulnerable to economic changes, and up until congress changed the retirement system from CSRS to FERS (google it if unfamiliar with the acronyms), the retirement benefits were superior on average. Before FERS, the trade off was lower salary for more secure employment and decent retirement. FERS involves a three part retirement compensation package (roughly one third annuity, one third social security, and one third Thrift Savings Program or TSP (similar to a 401K). The TSP and social security portions make federal retirement benefits more susceptible to negative economic impacts. A good test of the relative value of a federal government job historically would be to ask people you know who are 40 years or older if they ever considered seeking or were encouraged by family/friends to seek federal employment. I suspect honest answers would be quite enlightening. You also might want to factor geographic location and the historical availability of federal and private employment for specific localities into your analysis.

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