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Want to get rich? Work for feds

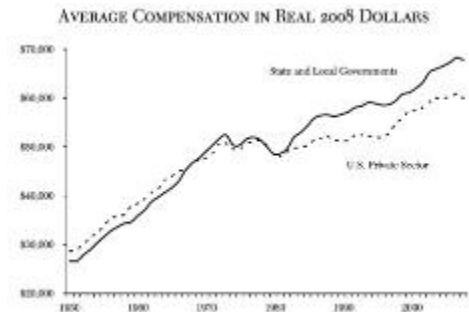
Examiner Editorial
April 29, 2010

For decades, public sector unions have peddled the fantasy that government employees were paid less than their counterparts in the private sector. In fact, the pay disparity is the other way around. Government workers, especially at the federal level, make salaries that are scandalously higher than those paid to private sector workers. And let's not forget private sector workers not only have to be sufficiently productive to earn their paychecks, they also must pay the taxes that support the more generous jobs in the public sector.

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.

The situation is the same when state and local government compensation data is compared with that of the private sector. As the Cato Institute's Chris Edwards notes in the current issue of the Cato Journal, "The public sector pay advantage is most pronounced in benefits. Bureau of Economic Analysis data show that average compensation in the private sector was \$59,909 in 2008, including \$50,028 in wages and \$9,881 in benefits. Average compensation in the public sector was \$67,812, including \$52,051 in wages and \$15,761 in benefits." Those figures likely underestimate the true gap on the benefits side because the typical government employee gets a guaranteed defined benefit pension under very generous terms, while the private sector norm is a 401(K) defined contribution plan that is subject to the ups and downs of the economy.

With the federal deficit and national debt heading into the stratosphere, taxpayers can no longer afford to support such lucrative government compensation. Public sector pay and benefits at all levels should be



Data shows the pay gap between state and local government and private sector workers. (Chris Edwards/Cato Institute)

reduced to make it comparable to the wages and benefits earned by the average working taxpayer. The first politician to propose a five-year plan for this purpose is likely to be cheered mightily by taxpayers.!

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