



Written by [Ralph R. Reiland](#) on December 20, 2010

Sky-High D.C. Salaries: Expensive Ineptitude

“Washington, D.C.’s workers enjoy the highest salaries of any U.S. city, with a median household income of \$85,198,” recently reported CNNMoney.



It’s even higher for the federal workers segment of the city’s workers, with an average wage last year for federal civilian workers of \$81,258 per person (per person, not per household). That’s over \$30,000 more than last year’s average private-sector wage. Add the cost of benefits and pensions and the average compensation gap between federal and private-sector workers jumps to nearly \$62,000 per year — \$123,049 vs. \$61,051.

That doesn’t mean they work the hardest or that they’re twice as smart.

Try phoning any of the major federal agencies in D.C. and see how long it takes for someone to pick up the phone, or how long it takes to get the right person in the right department who still can’t provide a dime’s worth of help.

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I got a letter last June from the main Social Security office asking me to clarify something about my automatically deducted contributions at work. They requested that I call an 800 number in Washington.

Knowing how things work — or don’t work — in D.C., I ordered a Greek salad with feta, red wine and a turkey club on pita and took a seat on the restaurant’s patio with my Wall Street Journal and the morning’s local newspaper before I dialed the 800 number.

The phone began ringing in D.C. at five minutes past the hour. My lunch order was delivered to the table after 10 minutes or so and I had finished my salad, sandwich, wine and two newspapers in about another 20 minutes and the phone was still ringing at the designated office of the central planners.

Taking a chance on losing my spot in the phone queue, I left my connected phone on the patio table and went inside the restaurant to order another wine and to find something more to read.

The phone was still ringing when I got back to my table. Curious to see how much longer it would take for someone to pick up, I stayed on the line.

It was 47 minutes when she finally picked up. I thought it sounded like she was in Bangladesh.

I didn’t say anything about the wait. If I complained, I thought they’d just hire even more people and raise my taxes, or borrow even more money from Beijing. We’re already being forced to turn over nearly 20 cents out of every dollar we earn, coast to coast, from New York to Los Angeles, into this 68 square mile area that’s the District of Columbia — and that’s not counting the money that’s extracted from our wallets to pay the price of ever-expanding federal regulations and mandates, and not counting the various tax bites at the state, city, county and local levels.



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I got only a few seconds into telling her what was in the letter from the Social Security office when she told me I had the wrong phone number. I explained that her phone number was in the letter but she said she didn't know anything, didn't have a clue, and that I should make a visit to my local Social Security office at such-and-such address. I told her that the office closed 10 years ago.

I thanked her, hung up the phone, gave up, and realized again why we haven't really won a war since the 1940s — unless you count Grenada, code-named Operation Urgent Fury, but that just lasted 37 hours.

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