



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on November 10, 2010

Federal Salaries Rise Fast Under Bush, Even Faster Under Obama

While average Americans have seen their wages and benefits stagnate, decrease, or even vanish altogether in recent years, federal workers have been doing very well for themselves. In August *USA Today* reported that “federal employees’ average compensation has grown to more than double what private sector workers earn” and that these same “workers have been awarded bigger average pay and benefit increases than private employees for nine years in a row.



The compensation gap between federal and private workers has doubled in the past decade.”

Those salary increases for federal employees have really added up, according to a new *USA Today* [analysis](#), which found that “the number of federal workers earning \$150,000 or more a year has soared tenfold in the past five years” — rising from 7,420 in 2005 to 82,034 in 2010 — “and doubled since President Obama took office.” The percentage of the federal workforce earning over \$150,000 increased from 0.4 percent to 3.9 percent during that same timeframe. “Since 2000,” says the paper, “federal pay and benefits have increased 3% annually above inflation compared with 0.8% for private workers, according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis.”

Among the key findings of the analysis is that “top-paid staff have increased in every department and agency.” The report mentions specifically that “the Defense Department had nine civilians earning \$170,000 or more in 2005, 214 when Obama took office and 994 in June” — a pattern that hardly comports with neoconservatives’ [portrayals](#) of Obama as a defense-budget slasher.

Those who have been on Uncle Sam’s payroll for 15 to 24 years got the biggest raises. “Since 2005,” says *USA Today*, “average salaries for this group climbed 25% compared with a 9% inflation rate.” Yes, you read that correctly: While civilians were struggling to make ends meet in a recession, many federal workers saw their salaries — not counting their extraordinarily generous benefits — increase by a quarter, with every penny coming out of the pockets of those same struggling taxpayers.

The analysis also found that “medical doctors at veterans hospitals, prisons and elsewhere earn an average of \$179,500, up from \$111,000 in 2005.” Though still a huge increase, this is, perhaps, more justifiable based on the [salaries of private-sector physicians](#). However, if Washington would refrain from sending so many people into aggressive, unconstitutional wars and from criminalizing behavior outside the scope of its constitutional authority — activities that in themselves would save taxpayers countless dollars — most of the veterans’ hospital and prison doctors would not be needed.

The President has proposed a 1.4 percent raise for 2.1 million federal workers in the next fiscal year, a fairly modest increase compared to the increases documented by *USA Today* but still one that must be



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funded by taxpayers. National Treasury Employees Union President Colleen Kelley — who, of course, has a vested interest in obtaining higher salaries for federal employees — told the paper that the raise “‘should be implemented’ to help make salaries more comparable with those in the private sector.” This conveniently ignores the fact that federal compensation is, as mentioned above, more than twice that of the private sector for comparable jobs.

A better suggestion is the one offered by Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R-Utah), who will lead a panel overseeing federal pay in the session of Congress beginning November 15. Chaffetz, writes *USA Today*, “says he wants a pay freeze and prefers a 10% pay cut. ‘It’s stunning when you see what’s happened to federal compensation,’ he says. ‘Every metric shows we’re heading in the wrong direction.’”

Better still would be to follow Great Britain’s lead and start eliminating government jobs altogether. The British government expects to drop [almost half a million people](#) from its payroll over the next four years. The U.S. government could easily afford to shed at least as many employees. If this means that fewer regulations are written and enforced, fewer taxes are collected, and fewer wars are fought, the savings in compensation for the laid-off workers will be the least of its benefits.

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