



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on June 15, 2010

## Federal Employee Salary Bonuses Top \$400 Million in 2009

According to data obtained by a New Jersey news service from the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the Obama administration doled out over \$400 million in awards and merit pay incentives to federal employees last year. That's up about \$80 million over last year.



Remarkably, a number that astronomical only reflects the awards paid to about 65 percent of federal employees — the Departments of Defense, Treasury, the CIA, the FBI, the White House, Congress, and quasi-governmental agencies (like the U.S. Postal Service) are not included in those figures. The data obtained by the Asbury Park Press accounts for about 1.3 million federal workers.

The top earners included in the report were air traffic controllers and high-level department managers in Washington, D.C.

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While the awards given to Defense Department employees were not included in the OPM report, the latest year for which the information is available (2008) indicates that the Department of Defense paid out about \$92 million in bonuses to its employees. The Department of Defense employs roughly 687,000 men and women and of those, 100,000 received some sort of bonus check in 2008 in addition to their regular salary.

Overall, salaries for the federal government totaled about \$150 billion in 2009. The incentives paid, therefore, amount to only about 0.3 percent of that total. That is to say, the payroll for the federal government runs about \$12.5 billion a month, not including the bonus checks.

Bonus checks awarded to federal employees are minuscule when compared to those of Wall Street financiers, however. Goldman Sachs, for example, paid out over \$16 billion to 32,500 employees. That works out to about half a million dollars per worker just in bonus money.

That private sector vs. public sector perspective was provided by James Sherk of the Heritage Foundation. The award money paid to federal employees, even the best and most deserving, "are a very, very small portion of federal employees' compensation," Sherk says. Sherk goes on to reason that the lack of respectable bonus packages discourages federal employees from performing at their best. "They are human. We are all human. People respond to incentives," said Sherk. "If your pay is based on your performance, you work harder," he continued.

Of course, there are powerful unions protecting the compensation packages of federal employees. One



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of the largest of those organizations claim that the amount of money available to federal managers is too small to encourage good work in the civil service. "Less than half of a percent (of the payroll) is a very small amount of money to play around with to provide awards," said Jacqueline Simon, the public policy director of the American Federation of Government Employees. "It's not enough to really alter the incentive structure in the pay system."

One wonders how much money would be available for many noble and meritorious projects if the government were to be reduced in size to a level corresponding to the powers granted the national government in the Constitution.

While not all such awards are monetary, the range of cash payouts runs from \$25 to \$94,200. The high end bonus was paid to a senior foreign affairs officer at the Department of State in D.C.

Interestingly, about 25 percent of those employed by the federal government received some sort of bonus compensation in 2009, according to the figures listed in the OPM report.

As a group, air traffic controllers raked in the most incentive money with over 13,000 of them receiving an average bonus check of \$2,398. That figure is nearly four times the average payout in 2008.

With regard to individual bonuses, those were predictably awarded to high ranking government officials. Over \$11 million in incentive money was paid to "senior executives," about 870 of them, each of whom cashed a check ranging from \$43 to \$94,200, for an average of \$13,337. The average yearly salary of those executives was about \$163,000 in 2009.

Of course the highest paid federal employee is Barack Obama with an average salary of \$400,000. While President Obama is the highest paid of all the federal officials, the doctors at the Veterans Administration come very close to that figure, with 23 of them earning about \$350,000 a year in regular salary. Given that plump figure, it isn't surprising that only one of them received a bonus check and that was in the amount of \$650.

The figures cited seem trifling when compared to the "real money" spent by the federal government in prosecuting various undeclared wars around the globe, the total cost of which since 2001 is in excess of \$1 trillion and counting.

While there are few that would deny a hard-working employee of the national government a competitive salary and appropriate incentive awards, the size of that entity should be reduced to within the very limited, very well-defined boundaries established by our Founding Fathers in the Constitution of 1787.

If such a reduction were made a priority of those signing the checks, perhaps the legitimate billets in the federal government would be filled by the best, brightest, and most qualified. In the United States of America, each and every check drawn on the U.S. Treasury is endorsed (tacitly at least) by "We, the People." The sooner we realize that and begin exercising greater fiscal control over the government and demanding that our elected officials carry out our wishes, the happier and healthier this Republic will be.

Until such mastery is asserted over the purse strings of government, the citizens of this nation will continue being forcibly marched along the gradual sloping path of economic servitude, a path that invariably leads to absolute enslavement and unfettered government oversight of every aspect of our existence.

Be assured that these embryonic despots will never take any action that would permanently stunt their own growth. There are times, perhaps, that they will feign lassitude just long enough to lull us into



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docility or disregard, but their one true aim, regardless of tactical retreats, is the abolition of freedom in all its iterations and the chaining of human liberty with shackles of absolutism forged in the slow burning ovens of economic control.



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