

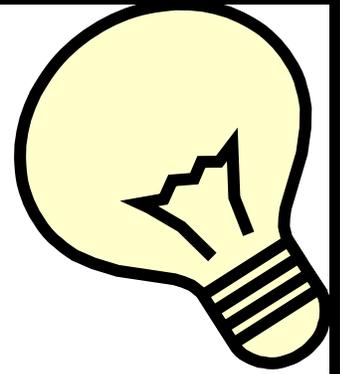
The

# Illuminator

Shedding Light on the HR World

9-2009

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This publication is issued to ensure the Fort Benning commanders, managers, supervisors, and employees are kept informed of employment and staffing issues. Monthly issuances will contain updated information on specific employment topics (i.e., compensation, recruiting procedures, travel entitlements, classification issues, NSPS implementation information, the Maneuver Center of Excellence (MCOE) civilian transition, etc.).

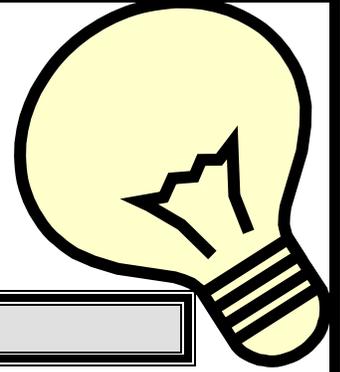
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*Retirement, Life/Health Insurance, TSP, Social Security and Such*

**COLA Count Sinks Deeper.** The inflation index used to set the January 2010 federal retiree COLA dropped by 0.2 percentage points in July, sending the COLA count deeper into negative territory after six months in which it had climbed upward from the steep drop at the onset of the counting period. The count now stands at -2.3 percent and it appears unlikely that a COLA will be paid; benefits won't be reduced, however.

There apparently remains a misperception among federal employees and retirees that COLAs and pay raises are linked in some way, which sometimes is expressed as a belief that one acts as some type of floor for the other. In fact, the two are determined separately and one has no effect on the other. COLAs are for retirees and are set automatically according to an inflation index in which the average of one third quarter of a calendar year is compared to that of the next. Thus, the 2010 COLA decision will be announced in October when the September inflation number is released.

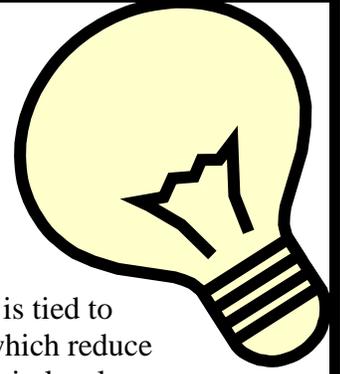
Active employees get a pay raise, although many of them call it a COLA, that is set in the annual congressional appropriations process, where numerous political and budgetary factors are involved.

The two types of adjustments don't track each other and one sometimes is significantly larger than the other. That happened earlier this year, when retirees received a 5.8 percent increase while active employees received a raise averaging 3.9 percent; for 2010, the roles apparently will be reversed. The starting point for raise deliberations typically is the employment cost index, which is a measure of wage growth, not inflation, for the 12 months ending in the third calendar quarter of the year preceding the one in which the raise deliberations are made for the following year; thus, there is an additional year's lag time compared with the retiree COLA determination. For 2009, the applicable ECI number was 2.9 percent; under federal pay law, a half percentage point is supposed to be shaved off that amount in order to keep employees roughly apace with private sector wage growth, and locality pay is supposed to be paid in addition sufficient to largely close local pay gaps. That system has never been implemented as designed, however, and this year the White House recommended a 2 percent raise, a figure not tied to any indicator. Congress is considering competing plans for either 2 or 2.9 percent, with an outside chance of 3.4 percent as a parity figure with military personnel.

Because COLAs under the Social Security program are set in the same manner as civil service retirement COLAs, it appears likely that there will be no adjustment in that program either, which would primarily affect employees retired under the FERS and CSRS Offset systems. In that situation, several other key Social Security figures also likely would remain unchanged; for example, a law prohibits an increase in the taxable

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maximum (currently \$106,800) if there is no COLA, even though that figure is tied to wage growth, not inflation. Similarly, the thresholds for the earnings tests, which reduce benefits paid to those who still have employment-related earnings above certain levels, likely would be frozen.

**Thrift Savings Plan, A Safe Deposit Box.** Despite the ups and downs of the stock market and limits on where and how much they were allowed to invest, about 21 federal workers now have Thrift Savings Plan accounts that are worth \$1 million. Or more. One of them is unique to the federal establishment because he got there the hard way. The multibillion-dollar, 22-year-old TSP is Uncle Sam's version of a 401(k) plan. It has 4.1 million investors. They include active postal and federal workers, members of the uniformed military and retirees who kept their money in the TSP when they left government. Retirees cannot add new money to the TSP, but they can move it around between funds just like current workers do.

Most of the TSP millionaires did it the easy way. That is, they transferred large sums of money — sometimes a million dollars or more — into the federal in-house 401(k) plan when they joined government. Most are believed to have been highly paid private-sector lawyers who became federal judges. They joined Uncle Sam not only to serve, but also because of the good benefits (like the TSP), lifetime health insurance and job security. They picked the TSP as the new safe-deposit box for their outside retirement accounts because it offers the supersafe G-fund composed of special, guaranteed Treasury securities and because the TSP's administrative fees are much lower than even the most economical outside mutual fund family. Higher fees can erode an investment portfolio's returns over time.

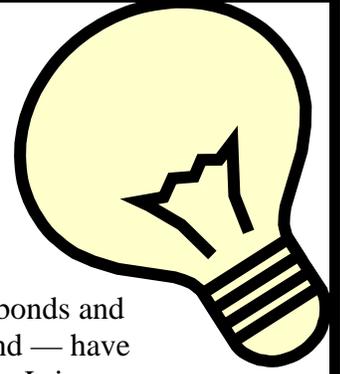
But at least one fed — call him the Unknown Millionaire — grew his six-figure account the old-fashioned way: by investing the maximum amount, on a steady basis, and taking advantage of the 5 percent TSP match that the government makes available to most working feds.

Like all 401(k) plan options, the federal TSP's track record has its ups and downs. It offers three index funds that invest in the total U.S. stock market, an international fund that invests in the markets of 21 nations, a bond-index fund and the Treasury G-fund. During the past 12 months the C, S and I funds (which invest in the S&P 500 stock index, the U.S. small cap market and the international market) were down 19.89 percent, 21.08 percent and 21.59 percent, respectively.

But since the market bottomed in early March, the stock funds have roared back. As of July 31, the C-fund has returned 7.58 percent year to date, the S-fund is up 8.66 percent and the International I-fund is up 9.74 percent.

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The five life-cycle funds — which range from a conservative mix of stocks, bonds and Treasury securities to a more aggressive portfolio for the 2040 target date fund — have done well this year, ranging from a 1.94 percent return for the least aggressive L-income fund to 7.01 percent for the most aggressive L-2040 fund.

FERS flu

In their last year of federal service, a substantial number of workers under the newer Federal Employees Retirement System take an unusual amount of sick leave. Some take 30 to 40 days within the year.

While we've dubbed it the FERS flu, government insiders say it is more likely that the FERS employees — who are under a use-it-or-lose-it sick-leave system — are simply burning up what they can't take with them. The older, longer-service employees under the old Civil Service Retirement System do get credit for unused sick leave. When they are eligible to retire, they can add that time on to their service, boosting their lifetime annuities by 2 percent to 4 percent.

Congress, as part of its defense authorization bill, is considering legislation to give FERS employees the same incentive to save their sick leave. A similar provision was included in the House-passed tobacco bill but stripped from the Senate version.

Now it is back in the House version of the defense spending bill, but insiders say it will have a tough time in conference — when the House and Senate iron out differences — because the Obama administration opposes it.

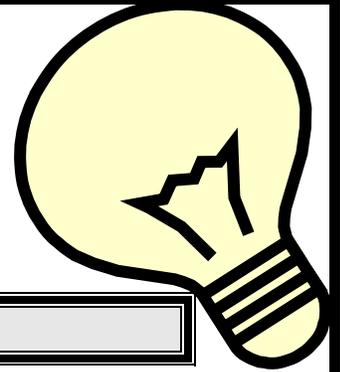
The Obama administration "may be holding it over our heads to guarantee that we will go along with a modified pay-for-performance system," said a lobbyist familiar with the give-and-take on Capitol Hill. That system, known as the National Security Personnel System (NSPS), covers more than 200,000 civilian defense workers.

Federal unions that endorsed President Obama during the election campaign expected that NSPS and similar systems would be frozen or abolished altogether. They said it was a Bush administration tool that isn't working and encourages discrimination in the distribution of pay raises.

But the White House has said it wants a modified pay-for-performance system that guarantees that raises will be distributed fairly. It is working on its own version and hopes to persuade rank-and-file feds, managers and federal unions that a workable system is possible.

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## *Employment-Related News*

**Agencies Seek Civilians for Afghanistan Missions.** The federal government is still trying to recruit hundreds of civilian employees for reconstruction work in Afghanistan — and it will need feds to fill those jobs for years to come, according to a top diplomat. The Obama administration announced plans in March for a “civilian surge” that would send about 900 feds to Afghanistan to work on development projects.

For example, the Agriculture Department has more than a dozen staffers deployed in Afghanistan, working on farming projects. A Treasury Department task force is working to cut off funding to the Taliban. More than 50 staffers from the State Department and other agencies are working on a “counterpropaganda” effort to combat myriad radio stations affiliated with the Taliban.

Richard Holbrooke, the Obama administration’s special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, refused to put a timetable on deployment last week during a panel discussion hosted by the Center for American Progress.

“We’re going to help rebuild [Afghanistan],” Holbrooke said. “The military part of this struggle, with American troops, is not an open-ended event, but our civilian assistance is going to continue for a long time.”

Holbrooke spoke on the panel with 10 of his senior advisers. He said that was to underscore the Obama administration’s multiagency approach to Afghanistan. An Agriculture official talked about the farming experts serving on provincial reconstruction teams in the war-torn country. The teams have provided equipment and education for farmers across the country. They’ve also tried to provide alternative crops for poppy farmers since Afghanistan is the world’s largest source of opium and heroin.

“We were spending more trying to eradicate poppy than on trying to promote agriculture,” said Otto Gonzalez, an Agriculture staffer and one of Holbrooke’s senior advisers.

Meanwhile, a team from the Treasury Department is working with staffers from the Justice Department and the intelligence community to shut down sources of funding for the Taliban. The Taliban raises money externally, often from countries in the Persian Gulf, and internally through crime and the drug trade.

“These funds come from the narcotics trade, extortion, kidnapping,” said Rami Shy, Holbrooke’s senior adviser from the Treasury Department. “We formed an illicit-finance task force to disrupt activities that threaten our efforts in the region.”

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The State Department is using direct-hire authority to bring on 75 new staffers by the end of this fiscal year. Many of them will be assigned to public communication and counterpropaganda work.

The Afghan government only operates one radio station, Radio Khyber; the Taliban, meanwhile, has access to several stations in Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan.

Another 50 positions will be filled by Foreign Service officers; Holbrooke said during congressional testimony in June that he expects to have “no trouble” filling those posts by year’s end.

Holbrooke also said the government is trying to reduce its dependence on contractors. Almost 90 percent of the money spent on reconstruction in Afghanistan has filtered through contractors. Holbrooke said he wants to give more of that money directly to the Afghan government, to reduce the incidence of waste by contractors and to strengthen the government.

**Employees See Supervisors and Mentors as Key to Advancement.** Employees feel that a supportive supervisor who encourages development and advancement and/or a senior person or mentor looking out for one’s interests are the most important factors in career advancement, the Merit Systems Protection Board has said.

In reviewing the results from its 2007 career advancement survey it said employees feel that getting ahead has do with both "who you know and what you know."

MSPB identified career accelerators that it says provide practical strategies for employees to explore in terms of how to advance their careers, as well as identifying roles supervisors can play in helping them.

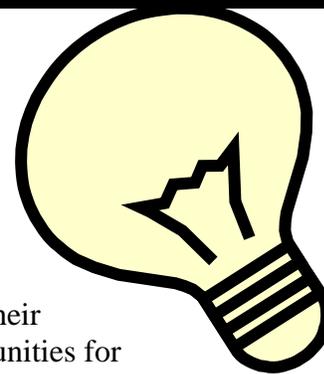
Nearly 80 percent of respondents said contacts that know a selecting official and recommend a person are very important to career advancement.

According to MSPB, the importance of personal connections in the workplace cannot be underestimated, and it concluded that agencies must select supervisors that will treat employees fairly, educate supervisors on their responsibilities to all employees as well as to hold them accountable if they should ever misuse their authority.

The flipside to the important role supervisors and mentors can play in career advancement is the personal responsibility employees much take for their own careers, MSPB said.

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Employees must be proactive and partner with their supervisors to develop their knowledge, skills, and abilities, and they need to aggressively pursue opportunities for further advancement, MSPB said.

Among the top 10 career advancement factors selected in survey that are focused on the individual are – in order -- the ability and willingness to take on challenging work assignments, high quality past work experience, extensive past work experience, specialized or technical training, formal education, acting in a position prior to appointment, and developmental assignments.

If an employee feels his or her supervisor does not have the time or inclination to assist in development, MSPB recommends being proactive by speaking up and starting a discussion and if that doesn't do it, try to change supervisors or seek out a mentor.

MSPB also recommends being a known quantity to a selecting official. Officials often have to choose among individuals to they have directly observed and those they haven't for promotion, and will often go with the familiar over the unfamiliar.

**OPM Stresses Telework in Flu Preparedness.** OPM has sent additional guidance to agencies on pandemic flu preparation, with director John Berry emphasizing the importance of being "telework ready."

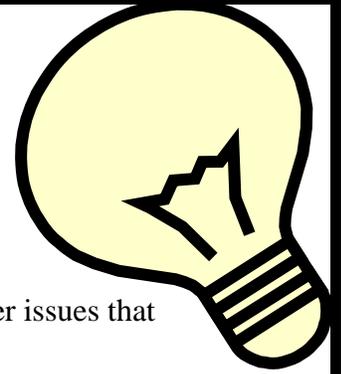
"The federal government cannot shut down and will be expected to continue essential operations during all phases of a pandemic influenza. As we plan for the future, we recognize pandemic influenza is difficult to predict because it has the potential for quickly mutating and spreading, but we can mitigate its effects on employees and government services through social distancing interventions such as telework," the memo said.

"Telework can be an important tool in two different ways," it added. "First, as the pandemic influenza approaches and intensifies in a geographic area, telework can be used in advance of any formal evacuation orders and requirements to work at home (or at an alternative location mutually agreeable to the agency and the employee). Second, if an evacuation is ordered, and designated employees must work at home, agencies who have prepared for and tested telework capabilities as part of their normal HR flexibilities program, will be in a far better position to meet mission needs."

It added that agencies "need to implement and maintain a robust IT system with the necessary infrastructure (including bandwidth and VPN access) to accommodate a sudden spike in remote usage of agency systems as well as the accompanying technical support personnel to resolve remote connectivity issues."

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OPM also posted updated information about leave, excused absence and other issues that may arise in a pandemic situation at [http://www.opm.gov/pandemic/OPM-Pandemic\\_AllIssuances.pdf](http://www.opm.gov/pandemic/OPM-Pandemic_AllIssuances.pdf).

**U.S. OPM Director Announces Establishment of New SES Office.** August 20, 2009, the Director of the United States Office of Personnel Management announced the establishment of a centralized office to serve the Senior Executive Service (SES) program. OPM Director John Berry directed that program functions currently spread across multiple offices will be consolidated in order to increase efficiency and better serve agencies across the Federal government.

"The Senior Executive Service fosters a large share of the innovation and talent needed to transform our government into a 21st century resource for the American public," said OPM Director John Berry. "Fully supporting this dynamic talent pool requires the Office of Personnel Management to implement new mechanisms that maximize the potential of these executives within the Federal workforce. The establishment of a centralized SES office will increase the efficiency of our efforts to better serve Federal agencies and build a world-class workforce."

The new Senior Executive Service office will provide the framework for Federal agencies to operate the SES program. Duties of the consolidated office will include outreach to stakeholders in the SES program, such as the Senior Executive Association and Executive Resource managers throughout the Federal government. This will include providing executive resource forums for agency executive resources specialists and leading workshops and roundtables on leadership development topics. Additional activities of the office include the management of the Qualifications Review Board, which certifies the executive core qualifications of SES applicants. The office will also provide recommendations on the requests for agency SES, Senior Level, and Senior Technical position allocations, certification of senior performance appraisals systems and candidate development programs.

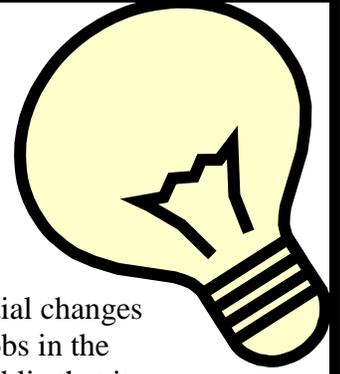
The Senior Executive Service was established by the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 and was implemented 30 years ago. The SES was created to allow Federal agencies the ability to attract and retain highly competent executives crucial to the operation of government. Organized as a third service of the Federal government, the SES is separate from the competitive and excepted services in which other Federal employees serve. The SES covers positions in the executive branch classified above GS-15.

For more information of the Senior Executive Service, visit: [www.opm.gov/ses](http://www.opm.gov/ses)

**Making the Case.** When Office of Personnel Management Director John Berry announced in May that he would pursue pay reform during his tenure, he also outlined an

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important and somewhat unusual component of that effort. To make substantial changes to federal pay, and again attempt to close the pay gap between comparable jobs in the public and private sectors, Berry said he will have to convince the general public that it has a stake in such reforms.

He isn't alone in believing that management reformers must build public awareness of and support for their initiatives if they're going to achieve their goals in government performance. But the Obama administration's management officials face a daunting challenge educating the public about what government does, and making the case that agencies need resources and attention to improve.

"There are nice experiments bottom up, but you need a clear mandate from the top," said Nancy Killefer, President Obama's first choice for chief performance officer, during a July event on improving government performance at the Center for American Progress in Washington. "This has to be a mandate that survives a news cycle. This is not going to happen overnight."

The problem is cracking that news cycle, and convincing mainstream media that government management challenges are worth continuous detailed coverage -- not just when something goes wrong, or when an arresting statistic catches a journalist's attention. In a May meeting with reporters to discuss the administration's agenda for the federal workforce, Berry cited pundits like CNN's Lou Dobbs, who frequently argues that federal workers are overpaid compared to most members of the general public, as an obstacle to convincing ordinary Americans that to be competitive, federal agencies might have to offer higher salaries.

It's not just that some inaccurate perceptions about federal pay exist. The problem is even more basic, said Max Stier, president of the nonprofit Partnership for Public Service, pointing out that many Americans simply don't understand the full scope of what the federal government does. As the debate over health care reform has ramped up, there have been a [steady trickle of stories](#) about lawmakers whose constituents have asked them to "keep your government hands off my Medicare," as one town hall attendee recently told Rep. Bob Inglis, R-S.C. Medicare and its counterpart Medicaid are both government-funded programs administered through the Health and Human Services Department.

Stier said even when citizens do understand what federal agencies do, the language the government uses to describe management challenges, or even basic human resources issues, is often incomprehensible.

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"The government even talks about vacancy announcements rather than job opportunities," Stier said. "There's a whole separate process that's grown up that's inside government-speak that does not translate to the public."

Those are formidable obstacles Berry -- and the administration as a whole -- will face if they are to educate the public about how government works and how it could work better. Berry has been appearing frequently at Washington events and at conferences across the country to make the case for a new dialogue about civil service to people who already are interested in management reform. And an October conference on pay and management reform sponsored by Harvard University and scheduled to be held in the Washington area, will attract listeners from outside the Beltway.

Stier agreed that it's important to rally the troops, the stakeholder groups that talk to the media and release reports, universities that communicate with students who are looking for jobs, and practitioners eager for a place to apply their skills. He also reiterated Berry's point that the dialogue about federal pay and employee productivity will have to extend far beyond the current boundaries of the debate to have any impact.

"All too often, we talk to ourselves and to a small population of people who are deeply invested in this," Stier said. "At the end of the day, what we have to demonstrate is that this matters to people who don't see this as their primary issue, but rather who have some other agenda -- be it the environment, or children, or defense, and unless you can connect this issue to that network of ideas, you don't succeed. It's performance for the sake of better outcomes in areas people care about."

**Federal Pay Gap With Private Sector Growing.** According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis (an organization within the Department of Commerce), the average federal employee now makes \$79,197, not including benefits. And, when benefits are added in, the average federal employee compensation averaged \$119,982 based on 2008 figures.

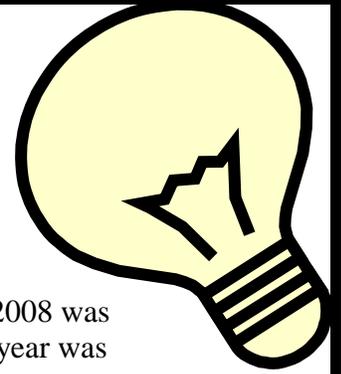
[Chris Edwards](#), the Director of Tax Policy Studies at the Cato Institute, [has researched the Commerce Department figures and compared](#) the average federal employee's salary and benefits with the average private sector employee's salary and benefits. No doubt, you will be reading about this in many local newspapers in the days and weeks to come.

The tables are daunting but, for those who want more information on the information compiled by the Commerce Department, [you can view them](#).

The average private sector employee salary averaged \$49,935. And, when including benefits, the average private sector employee averaged \$59,909 in total compensation.

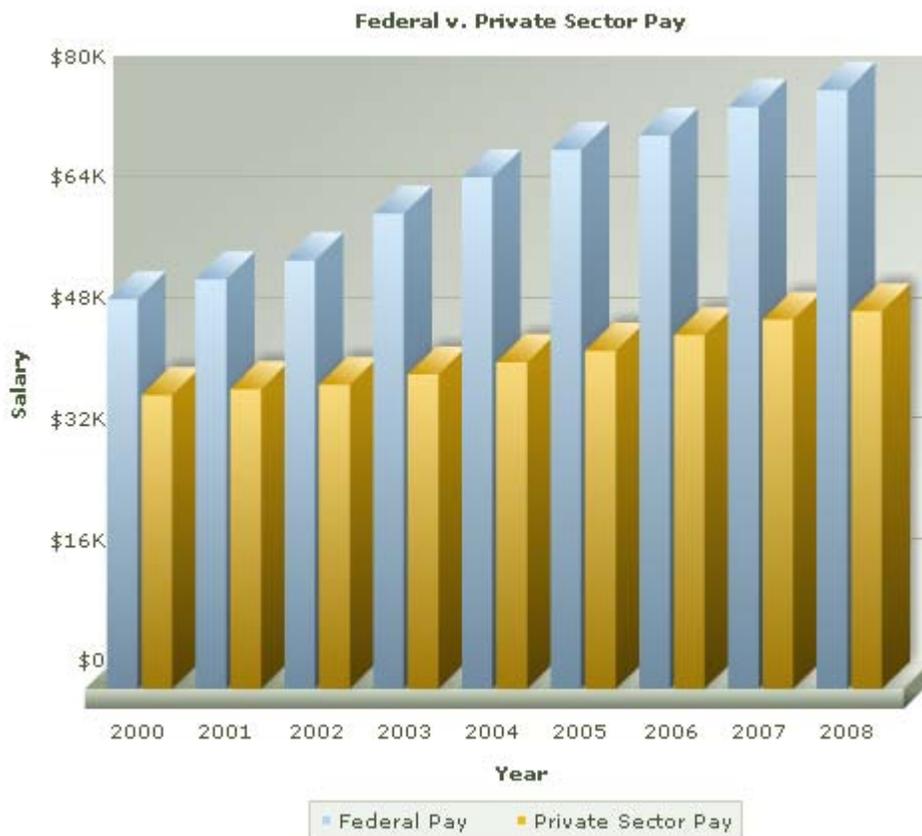
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Stated differently, the benefit cost for the average federal employee back in 2008 was \$40,785. The average benefit cost for private sector employees for the same year was \$9974.

Here is a chart showing the relative pay levels from 2000 - 2008. By the way, I pulled the figures in this chart are from the tables by the Bureau of Economic Analysis. Any error in the figures should be attributed to me and not to Chris Edwards:

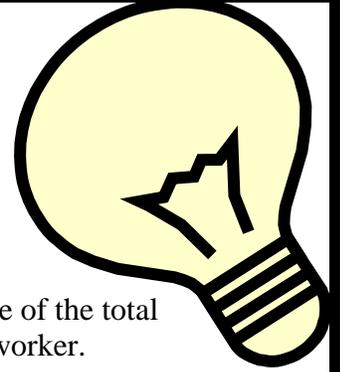


The pay gap with the private sector is not new. Federal employee salaries and total compensation has been higher than those in the private sector for a number of years. For example, Chris Edwards points out that back in 1990 the average federal employee salary was \$32602 and the average private sector salary was \$25857.

At that time, there was also a gap between the total compensation package. The average federal employee had a benefits package with a value of \$4852. The average private sector employee had a benefit package with a value of \$13894--a difference of \$9042 in favor

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of the average federal employee. Now, as noted above, the difference in value of the total salary and compensation package is \$60,073 in favor of the average federal worker.

Mr. Edwards notes that the compensation gap between private and federal workers actually grew larger during the Bush administration. He sums up the differential this way: "The result has been an increasingly overpaid elite of government workers, who are insulated from the economic reality of recessions and from the tough competitive climate of the private sector....At the same time, gold-plated federal benefit packages should be scaled back as unaffordable given today's massive budget deficits. There are many qualitative benefits of government work—such as extremely high job security—so taxpayers should not have to pay for such lavish government pay packages."

So what does this mean for the federal workforce?

A number of readers usually comment that the figures are misleading because federal employees don't cook hamburgers and serve french fries at a fast food restaurant so that federal salaries should be higher than the average private sector worker.

There is certainly validity to that argument. But, for those who follow politics in America, you know that perception and political reality are often closely aligned. The current debate on health care, for example, has focused attention on the health care program offered to federal employees. A number of people speaking out on the issue have argued that everyone in America should have the same health care program as federal employees. How this would be paid for is usually not addressed. But that is an important issue since most of the cost of the health care for federal employees is paid by the government.

In short, federal benefits are quite good compared to the average American. In a time when the political philosophy seems to be leaning toward more equality of income and

**Want to Cut Federal Spending? Here Are Proposals to Cut Federal Benefits.** This article was written by Ralph Smith and posted in FEDSmith. Permission was sought and granted to use it in its entirety.

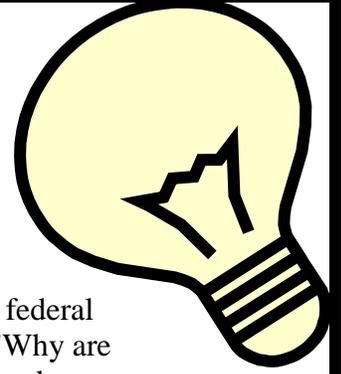
The federal government is taking on debt at an unsustainable pace. The interest alone on the national debt is projected to be getting close to one trillion dollars a year in the near future.

The result is that, sooner or later, Congress will get around to wondering how to cut government spending.

**Proposals to Cut Federal Benefits Unlikely to Pass**

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We have previously run articles on proposals to save money by changing the federal retirement plan or other benefits. The response of some is along the lines of "Why are you using scare tactics like this to upset your readers? We know this is proposed every year and it never happens."

If that is your view, please don't read any further. It may scare you and, if it is your view that proposals to reduce federal benefits (including the retirement program) will never happen, you will consider it to be a waste of time.

For those with an interest in the alternatives that are being proposed, and how it may impact the federal workforce, read on.

***These are proposals from the budget savings proposals advanced by in an alternative budget advanced by Republicans. For those who are convinced changes such as these will never happen, you are probably right. Barack Obama is obviously a liberal Democrat and the Congress is controlled by the same party and that makes it much less likely these changes will be implemented.***

On the other hand, trillion dollar deficits such as the ones proposed for this year and the next several years will lead to consequences that may be difficult to predict. The federal workforce is paid, on average, considerably more than private sector workers. While there are good arguments for the distinction, keep in mind that the government is pursuing pay caps for many in private sector companies.

Perhaps the federal government will be exempt from the "redistribution of wealth" philosophy but there will be many Americans who think federal employees make too much money and have benefits that are too generous. If or when Congress does get serious about cutting spending, cutting federal benefits could be a politically popular option.

So, for what it is worth, here is where there are proposed cuts in the federal budget to save a few billion dollars that would be extracted from the benefits currently provided to the federal workforce.

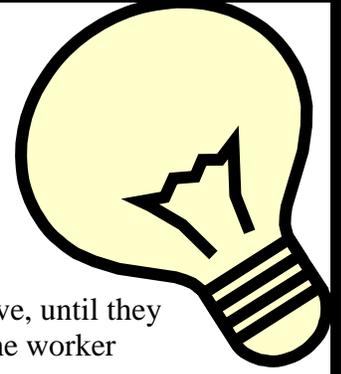
The summary and the rationale for these proposals are taken largely from the [Republican proposals](#). We are presenting them as they were proposed so that readers will understand the rationale behind the proposals.

## **Eliminate Retirement Payments For Federal Workers Who Retire Before Age 62**

The federal government provides its employees with a benefit more generous than that offered to private sector employees, Federal employees who retire at age 55 or older with

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at least 30 years of service or at age 60 with at least 20 years of service receive, until they reach 62, a benefit equal to the estimated Social Security benefit for which the worker will become eligible at age 62.

This policy not only encourages Federal employees to retire early, but it comes at a significant cost to taxpayers. Preliminary estimates indicate that the early retirement benefit costs taxpayers \$267 million a year.

## **Change "High Three Retirement Benefits" to "High Five" Calculation**

Initial pension benefits for federal civilian employees are calculated based on the average of an employee's highest earnings over three consecutive years. It is common practice in the private sector to base benefits on a five year average. The Congressional Budget Office has estimated that moving to a five year average would save taxpayers \$1.2 billion over five years.

*The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates that "the average new Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) retiree would receive about \$1,250 less in 2008 and \$6,530 less over five years than under current law."*

## **Eliminate Full-time Union Representatives From Federal Payroll**

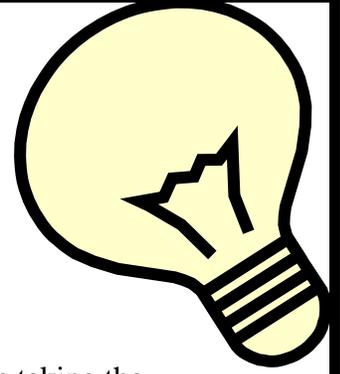
Under current law, federal employees who are part of a collective bargaining unit may be granted "official time" to perform representational duties on behalf of the union. While on official time, the employee is paid by the government but is acting on behalf of the union.

According to the Office of Personnel Management, in fiscal year 2008 the federal government spent \$120 million paying employees for their time spent working on union activities.

While some employees only spend minimal time on union activities, others are designated as 100 percent on official time, meaning they are paid to spend all of their time on union activities. In their report, OPM suggests a significant amount of the time spent on general labor-management category (as opposed to dispute resolution or contract negotiations) is spent by those on 100 percent official time. Eliminating 100 percent official time would save taxpayers millions of dollars each year. Savings of just 10% a year would save taxpayers \$12 million next year and \$60 million over five years.

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## Summary

The National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association (NARFE) is taking the proposals seriously. It is concerned enough to issue a [press release](#) denouncing the proposals.

Federal employee benefits have been largely immune from budget cuts. In fact, there is a likelihood that in the current Congress some benefits will be increased. If you are planning on retiring in the near future, my advice would be to follow the events in Congress closely in order to adequately plan your retirement future.

**Federal Employees and Their Pay: How They Stack Up.** Article posted in FEDSmith, written by Ralph Smith. A number of readers have been asking in their comments and email about the number of federal employees in the different pay grades or the number of federal employees in various pay ranges.

For example, one reader from the Department of Agriculture wrote:

*Would like to know where these averages came from. They were not out in the field where most of federal employees work. I think that average was taken in Washington DC only.*

A reader from the Department of the Army commented:

*I would like to know where people come up with these figures...because i would like to make the money they say we are making!!!!*

Another Army employee from Ft. Bragg, North Carolina had this to say:

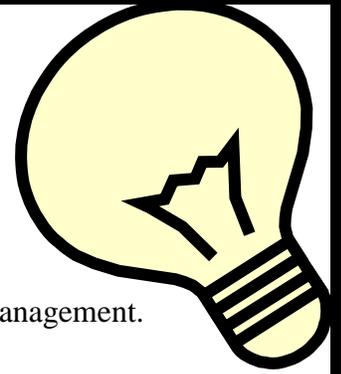
*When I see the average salary \$79,197 I'm blown away. That's almost equivalent to a GS 12 Step 6. How many of us normal worker bees are GS12 Step 6? I wish that was my average salary. The top salaried people working for the Federal Government pull that average up. If they are going to throw those figures around, they should at least say how many Federal workers make that much because it doesn't reflect where most of us are and the public gets the wrong impression.*

Perhaps this information will be helpful in gaining perspective on the federal workforce, at least those under the General Schedule or similar pay system.

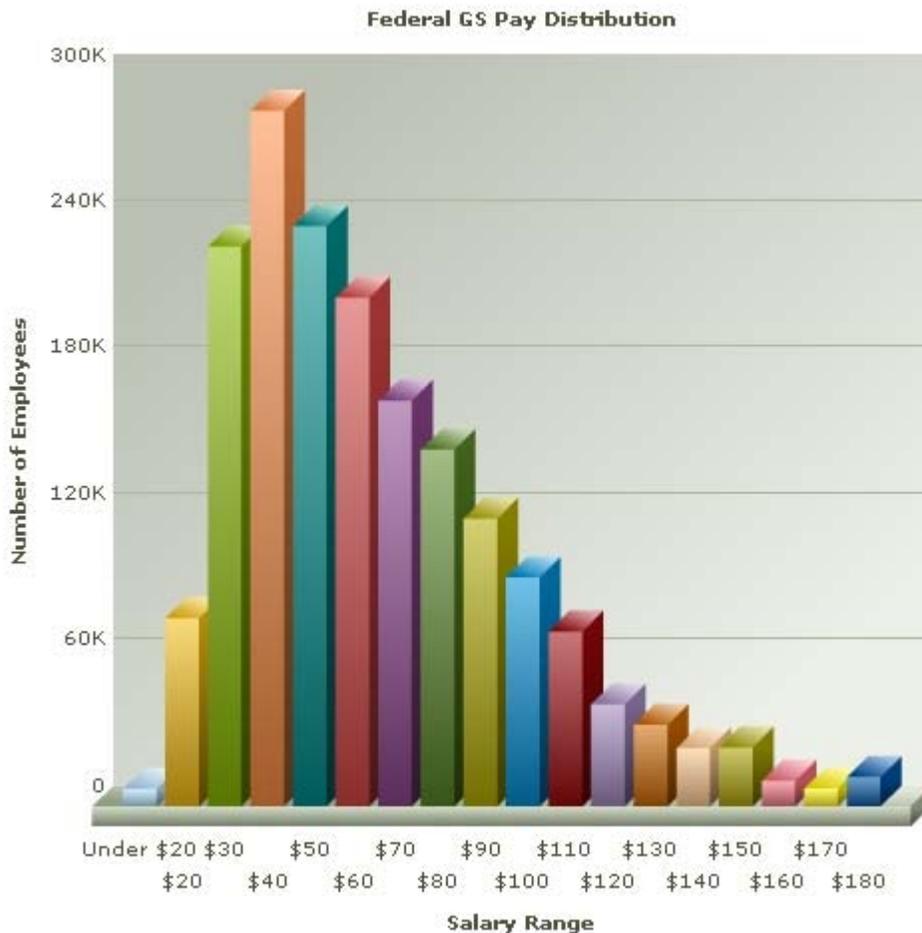
Here is a chart that depicts the number of federal employees in pay ranges. Each column represents a range of \$10,000. **So, for example, the number \$20,000 includes all GS employees who make from \$20,000 - \$29,999.**

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These figures are compiled from data provided by the Office of Personnel Management. The data is from March of 2009.



For those who are wondering about the distribution of GS grades, here is a depiction of the number of federal employees in each grade level. Please remember that the federal pay system is a morass with a wide variety of varying plans in a wide variety of agencies. This chart depicts the General Schedule and related pay plans. Here is how OPM defines these terms:

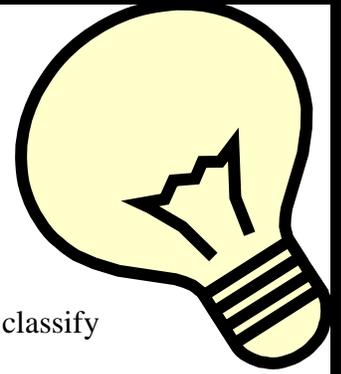
General Schedule and Related Grade is derived differently for the two groups that make up the General Schedule and Related pay plan category:

- 1. General Schedule and Identical Pay Plans**

The General Schedule and Related Grade is the actual grade of the pay plan. That

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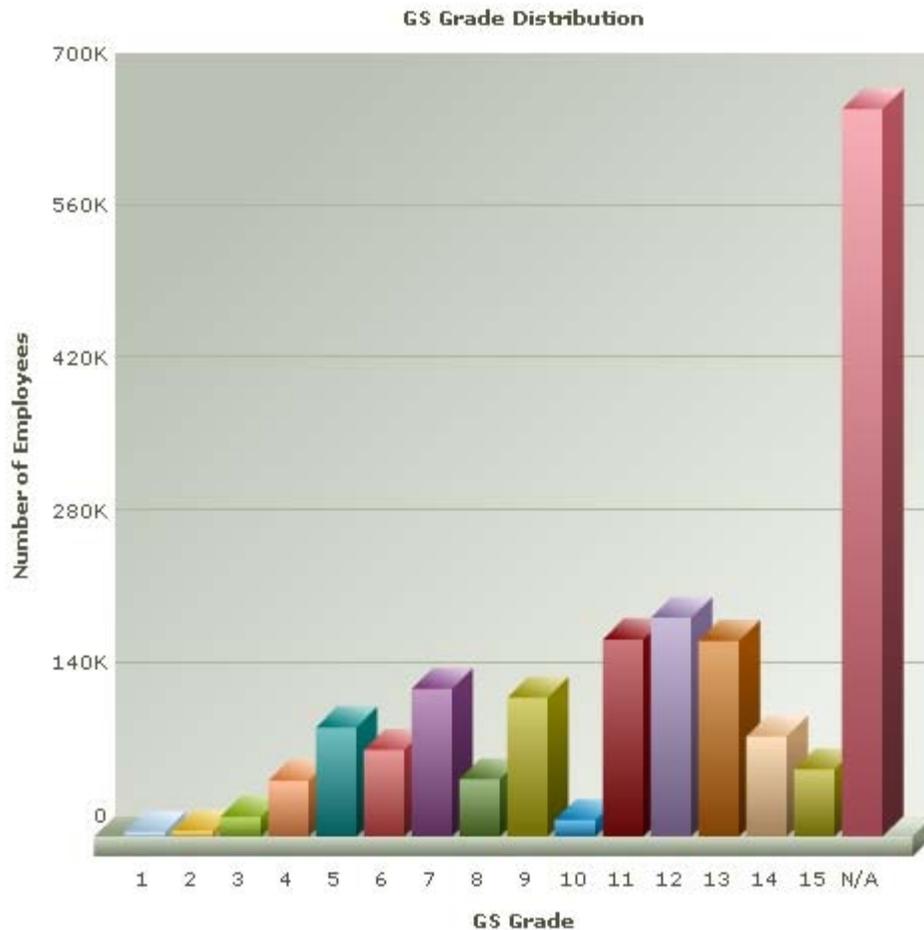
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is because these pay plans use the General Schedule grade structure to classify jobs.

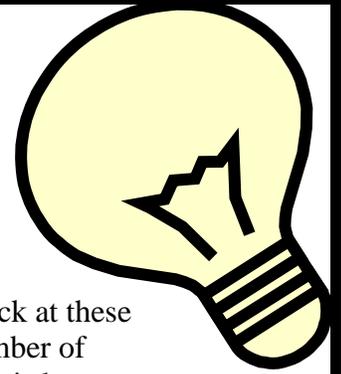
## 2. Other Related Pay Plans

The General Schedule and Related Grade will probably be something other than the actual grade of the pay plan. That is because these pay plans do not use the General Schedule grade structure to classify jobs. The General Schedule and Related Grade for these pay plans is derived from job analysis studies and/or algorithms that relate the grade and salary of other pay plans to the General Schedule and assign a General Schedule grade.



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These figures above reflect data as of March 2009. You may want to look back at these definitions when you look at the chart and are wondering about the large number of people in the N/A group. Since this is how the data is compiled by OPM, this is how we have presented it. The N/A is probably such a large group as agencies have set up their own pay systems under separate authorizing legislation or in demonstration projects so some employees do not fall within the GS pay and classification structure.

The pay of a federal employees varies based on the type of job and geographic location. For those who may be wondering why the average pay for a federal employee could be as high as it is, there are 857275 federal employees in grades GS9-GS15. This figure represents the entire federal workforce, not just those in the Washington, DC metropolitan area. There were 445749 federal employees in grades GS1-GS8.

**Employing the Use of Panels to Assist with the Hiring Process.** To ensure objectivity in the hiring process, many managers opt to employ the use of panels. A panel is a team of members committed to the selection of candidates for vacant positions. The panel process is beneficial because it provides varying perspectives, helps to eliminate biases, and benefits the organization by involving others outside the organization in the hiring decision.

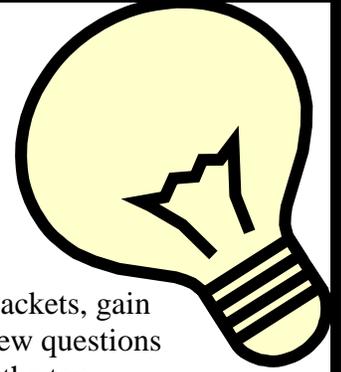
**Types of Panels:** Panels may be used to actually make the selection for the vacancy or to cull applicants and recommend the top candidates to the selecting official for further consideration. Panels utilized in the former manner are referred to as selection panels; whereas, panelists used to narrow the field of consideration are known as recommendation panels.

**Panel Composition:** Panels should consist of a minimum of three members, a chairman and two members who are equal or higher in grade than the position being filled; represent a cross-section of the organization (i.e. male/female, military/civilian, white/blue collar, black, white, etc); and, a variety of positions. Panel members should be selected and notified early on in the recruitment process, preferably prior to receipt of the referral list.

In *every* instance panels should contain an odd number of members. The selecting official *may* be the chairperson on the selection panel (although not required) but not on a recommendation panel [since this panel makes a recommendation to the selecting official]. At least one member should be thoroughly familiar with the knowledge, skills and abilities required to perform the functions of the position and with the work environment of the position

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**Responsibilities of Panel Members:** All panel members review applicant packets, gain consensus on who should be interviewed (if applicable), compose the interview questions (if applicable), conduct interviews as a team (if applicable), and either select the top applicant or recommend the top applicant(s) for further consideration by the selecting official. Although interviews are frequently conducted by panels, they are not mandatory as selection or referral recommendations may be made on the basis of the resume alone.

Each panel member makes a commitment to understand and follow process policies and procedures as determined by the panel. Participants are responsible for fulfilling the following roles:

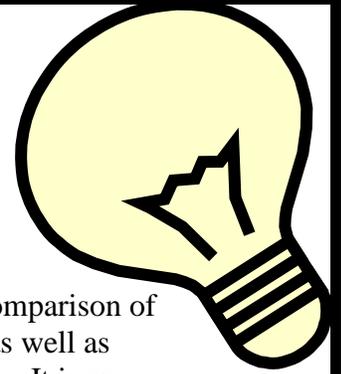
- Panel Chair - provides leadership to members and manages the process so that it is efficient and effective; is responsible for setting up panel meetings, arranging for interviews, contacting applicants, etc.; and is an equal member of the panel
- Panel members - commit the time needed to study applicant materials, fully participate in all meetings and interviews, meet established deadlines, and each are equal members of the panel

**How to Keep Your Panel on Track:** Panel tasks vary depending on whether the panel forms before, during or after the initial recruitment process, but there are certain steps that every panel needs to take in order to ensure the hiring process is effective. Use the following list of tasks to help keep panels on track:

- Decide upon individual roles within the panel
- Review the position description being used for recruitment, which includes things such as required qualifications, preferred qualifications, functions, and working conditions
- Develop a selection matrix if one is to be used
- Develop job-related interview questions to ask each candidate
- Review applicant materials
- Determine the most competitive applicants to interview, select, or refer for further consideration
- Contact applicants to interview and let them know they will be interviewed by a panel (if applicable)
- Conduct interviews (if applicable)
- Review and compare interview notes
- Reach consensus on best qualified applicant(s)
- Complete rating/tally sheets

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**Selection Matrixes:** A selection matrix is a tool that permits an objective comparison of an applicant's qualifications to a job vacancy's qualifications and functions, as well as comparison of one applicant to others based on established job-related criteria. It is an invaluable hiring tool because it provides equal employment opportunities to all applicants and upholds the integrity of the process by ensuring that selection decisions are made only on lawful, job-related and non-discriminatory criteria.

**How to Develop a Selection Matrix:** Either the selecting official or the panel will need to thoroughly analyze the position description, required qualifications, preferred qualifications and job functions. When analyzing these qualifications, take the following steps to develop a selection matrix:

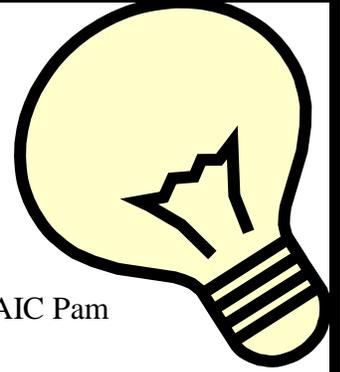
- Decide which technical and performance job skills are to be evaluated via the selection matrix
- Identify which qualifications are apparent on an application, and organize them into general categories on the matrix, such as education, technical job skills, and supervisory experience
- Determine which qualifications/skills must be observed in an interview or discerned from responses to interview questions, and organize these into categories
- Develop interview questions about the technical job skills and performance job skills that you can't see on applications—this will structure the interview in a way that helps fill in these gaps of information on the selection matrix
- Create a numeric rating system for the matrix:
  - Assign a range of rating points (normally 1-3 or 1-5) to each qualification
  - Give a numeric "weight factor" to each qualification based on the importance to the functions of the job; for example, if 50% of the position is performing one specific task, you might weigh that qualification as three times more important than other qualifications – if 50% of the position is performing one skill/task then you may want to make that weight factor a 15; therefore, a rating point score of 3 would be multiplied by 15 and would equal 45 points for that skill/task.

**Interviews:** Another tool that may be utilized by panels in the hiring process is the interview. In fact, a combination of interviews and matrix point scores may be utilized. Interviews may be conducted by the panel and/or the selecting official and may occur more than once during successive iterations of the process. Each applicant must be asked the same questions in the same order by the same panel member, and should be scored based on predetermined points

To ensure interview questions are job-related and target the desired skills/attributes, managers may opt to forward proposed questions to a CPAC staff member for review and

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/or assistance. Additional information on interviewing may be found in USAIC Pam 690-1.

**Confidentiality:** All members of the panel must keep the discussions, deliberations, rating matrixes, and other communications of the panel in strict confidence. In many instances panelists are required to sign non-disclosure statements to ensure confidential information is not released.

All notes from panel members should be securely maintained by the selecting official upon conclusion of the process. The chairman should take measures to ensure panel notes left unattended from one session to the next are also secure. Panel members should not discuss anything about the panel outside of panel members.

For additional information on panels, please contact your servicing HR Specialist. Information may also be located

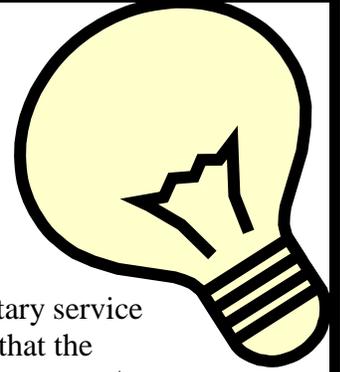
## ***Management-Employee Relations***

**Discharge for “Excessive” Military Service Absences Violated USERRA.** The Merit Systems Protection Board (Board) erred in rejecting an employee’s claim that the Postal Service violated the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 (USERRA) when it terminated him due to his “excessive” use of military leave, ruled the Federal Circuit Court of Appeals. The employee worked for the Postal Service from 1988 until his termination in 2000, during which time he served in the Army National Guard Reserve. He was absent from his job for long periods of time while on active duty with the National Guard. He was absent for over 22 total months between 1991 and 1995. Between 1996 and the date of his discharge in 2000, he worked at his Postal Service job for no more than four days. (Erickson v US Postal Service, FedCir, 92 EPD ¶43,620)

In January 2000, a Postal Service labor relations specialist contacted the employee and asked him whether he intended to return to his position with the Postal Service. The employee responded that he would not return to work until he completed his current tour of duty in September 2001. Shortly thereafter, the Postal Service began proceedings to discharge the employee based on his “excessive use of military leave,” claiming that the employee exceeded USERRA’s five-year limit on the amount of military leave an employee may use while retaining his employment rights under the statute. The employee’s discharge was finalized on March 31, 2000. The Board ruled that the employee’s military service was not a motivating factor in his dismissal, finding the “real reason” was his absence from work regardless of its cause.

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The Federal Circuit rejected the Board's conclusion that the employee's military service was not a motivating factor in his discharge. The appellate court pointed out that the Board's rationale went against the very tenets of what the USERRA seeks to protect. An employer cannot escape liability by claiming that it was merely terminating an employee on the basis of his absence when that absence was for military service, the Federal Circuit ruled. Regarding the five-year cap, the appellate court noted that it was undisputed that the employee's cumulative military absence at the time of his removal, after accounting for statutorily exempt service, did not exceed five years. Thus, the employee was protected under USERRA at the time the Postal Service removed him from employment.

**Restoration after Involuntary Retirement.** In *Aldridge v. U.S. Department of Agriculture*, 2009 MSPB 146 (July 28, 2009), the Merit Systems Protection Board ordered the appellant reinstated to her position after she proved that her retirement from federal service was involuntary. The Board also remanded the case for consideration of the appellant's disability discrimination claim.

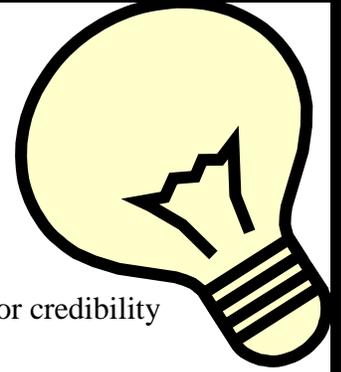
The appellant was an employee of the Department of Agriculture. The agency had proposed the appellant's removal for alleged performance deficiencies and attendance problems. The appellant alleged that in a meeting regarding the proposed removal notice, the deciding official and a human resources official told her she had three business days to submit retirement papers or else the removal would be instituted and she would lose all of her retirement benefits. Three business days later the appellant submitted her retirement papers. At the time of retirement, the appellant was a 28-year employee. The appellant later claimed that had not contemplated retiring when she did, but rather she retired because she believed she would lose her retirement benefits if she were removed.

The appellant filed an MSPB appeal alleging that her retirement was involuntary and that the agency had failed to provide her reasonable accommodation for her brain surgery and allergies. The administrative judge found that the appellant's decision to retire was not the result of agency misinformation and, thus, as a voluntary act, was outside of the Board's jurisdiction. In reaching this decision, the administrative judge found the testimony of the deciding official and human resources official credible with regard to the events leading to the appellant's retirement. On appeal, the Board found that the administrative judge had erred in his credibility determinations because the agency witnesses did not refute the appellant's testimony about having received and acted upon misinformation.

The Board found that the appellant had received misinformation from the agency regarding the impact removal would have on her eligibility for retirement benefits based on the appellant's clear account of what she was told, the lack of any contradiction by the human resources official, the provision of only a vague response by the deciding official, coworker testimony corroborating appellant's account of what she was told, and the lack of a reason to find the appellant not credible. In making its finding, the Board determined

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that the administrative judge had erred several times by making non-demeanor credibility determinations without sufficient evidence.

Also, the Board found that the appellant reasonably relied upon the misinformation to her disadvantage because the meeting with the deciding official and human resources official was the proximate cause of the appellant's decision to retire and there was no evidence that appellant knew at the time of retirement that the information she received from the agency was wrong. Ultimately, the Board found that it had jurisdiction over the appellant's separation and that the appellant was entitled to reinstatement because her retirement was involuntary. Additionally, the Board determined that the case had to be remanded for reconsideration of the appellant's disability discrimination claim. When an appeal of an alleged involuntary retirement is raised, then the Board will adjudicate the adjoining discrimination claim on the merits only after it is determined that the Board has jurisdiction.

This information is provided by the attorneys at Passman & Kaplan, P.C.

## ***Training, Self-Development, and Personal Improvement***

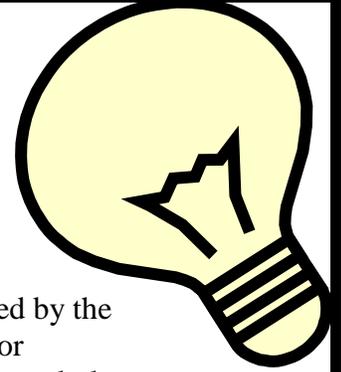
**Individual Development Plans (IDPs).** An IDP, a document prepared at either the supervisor's determination or the employee's request and jointly agreed upon, is a strategy outlining an employee's learning and developmental career goals. The plan specifically outlines developmental goals based the competencies necessary for successful performance in an employee's position and identifies the methods by which these goals will be accomplished that include, but are not limited to:

- mentoring, on-the job coaching and counseling
- formal classroom training, correspondence courses, review of publications/videotapes
- special assignments or details
- attendance at agency-sponsored briefings/conferences
- or any of a variety of other methods identified to assist the employee

While it is the supervisors' job to help employees meet and exceed performance standards and be more productive, employees are expected to be the "guardians" of their career and initiate self development. Through the use of an IDP, management is able to identify and assess employees' future developmental needs and provide structured learning experiences linked to the organizational goals and job requirements. Supervisor and employee discussions should include the organizational work objectives and training/development required to assist employees in the accomplishment of those

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objectives. These discussions may focus on the development of skills required by the employee to perform their current duties; improvement of skill deficiencies; or enhancement of existing skills necessary for successful job performance. Through the following procedures, employees and management are responsible for working towards creating a viable and realistic development plan:

1. Individual needs assessment - The process of assessing individual needs, planning how to meet those needs, and setting performance goals will enable employees to successfully perform the duties of the position, improve job performance, and prepare employees for future work assignments. The focus should be on needs that relate to the current position and organizational goals and objectives. To assess developmental needs, the discussions should center on current duties and priorities for performance; projects the employee will be involved in during the coming year; areas of performance where skills enhancement or improvement is appropriate; and professional development goals of the employee.\*
2. Select developmental activities that will be performed by the employee. Employees may conduct research to determine the development activities they will undertake and discuss these activities with the supervisor. Supervisors should assist employees and recommend developmental and training activities that would be appropriate.
3. Official documentation of the assessment and developmental activities on the Individual Development Plan. The plan will address the collaborative efforts agreed upon on the employee's developmental activities/assignments; time frame for completing developmental activities; formal training; and estimated costs. Once the plan is approved through the supervisory channel, requests for training and development must be officially approved. An approved [Standard Form 182, Authorization, Agreement and Certification of Training](#) is required before attendance at any internal or external training or developmental activity.

The IDP is a fluid document and should be developed, reviewed and updated on an annual basis. For new employees, a plan should be established within thirty days from the entrance on duty date. At the time of the annual performance review, a discussion between the supervisor and employee should be accomplished to determine whether the plan needs updating based on the employee performance and established work objectives.

\*While an employee's request for training to advance their career goals may not always be able to be accommodated by the organization, as referenced in [Code of Federal Regulations 5 CFR 410.202](#), human resource development programs must be mission-related and improve employee and organizational performance.

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For additional information on guidance and use of Individual Development Plans, please contact your servicing Civilian Personnel Advisory Center L/MER HR Specialist.

**Human Resources (HR) for Supervisors Course.** The HR for Supervisors Course encompasses instruction applicable to the National Security Personnel System (NSPS) and the Legacy (i.e. GS) System. The course is 4.5 days long, includes lecture, class discussion, exercises; and, is designed to teach new civilian and military supervisors of appropriated fund civilian employees about their responsibilities for Civilian Human Resource Management.

The last training course for this fiscal year will be 14 – 18 Sep. Registration information will be disseminated electronically.

Instruction includes the following modules:

- Introduction of Army CHR which includes coverage of Merit System Principles and Prohibited Personnel Practices, CHRM Life Cycle Functions, Operation Center and CPAC Responsibilities
- Planning
- Structuring – Position Classification
- Acquiring – Staffing and Pay Administration
- Developing – Human Resources Development
- Sustaining – Performance Management, Management Employee Relations, Labor Relations

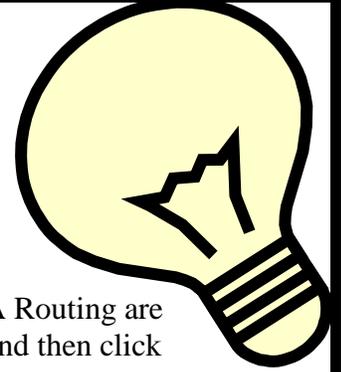
This instruction does *not* cover supervision of non-appropriated fund (NAF) or contract employees.

**RPA and ART Workshop.** The Fort Benning CPAC HR specialists are available to conduct RPA and ART desk-side walkthroughs and/or workshops to assist managers/supervisors and new DCPDS account holders with accessing and using DCPDS, ART, initiating RPAs, creating Gatekeeper Checklists, forwarding and tracking RPAs, generating reports and printing SF 50s. Training can be accomplished via individualized sessions or activity specific workshops upon request. If you desire training of this nature, please contact your servicing HR specialist to arrange for scheduling.

**Job Aids Available on the Web.** Lotus ScreenCams (how-to-movies) are available to assist DCPDS users with DCPDS, Army Regional Tools (ART), Oracle 11i and other automation tools. ScreenCam movies ART Logon, Ghostview, Gatekeeper, Inbox

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Default, Initiating an RPA, Logging On, Navigator, RPA Overview and RPA Routing are available on the web at: <http://www.chra.army.mil/>. Click on HR Toolkit and then click on the name of the movie to download or play it. Managers/supervisors and administrative personnel responsible for initiating RPAs are encouraged to review this site and check out these new tools. ART Users Guide has been updated and provides descriptions of and instructions for using tools available in ART, including such tools as Employee Data, Inbox Statistics (timeliness and status information about personnel actions), Organization Structure (information about positions in various organizational elements), and many more tools. It is intended for use by managers, resource management officials, administrative officers, and commanders as well as CPAC and CPOC staff members. There is both an on-line and downloadable Word version (suitable for printing).

In addition, to the ART Users Guide, there is a Defense Civilian Personnel Data System (DCPDS) Desk Guide which provides how-to information about tasks and functions that end users might need to perform in DCPDS, such as initiating a Request for Personnel Action (RPA) and creating a Gatekeeper Checklist. The ART Users Guide and the Desk Guide can be accessed from the CHRA web page at: <http://www.chra.army.mil/>, by clicking on HR Toolkit. In addition to these tools the Fort Benning CPAC staff is available to assist you in accessing DCPDS, ART, initiating RPAs, creating a Gatekeeper Checklist, forwarding and tracking RPAs, generating reports and printing an SF 50. If you have any questions or need assistance, please contact your servicing HR specialist to arrange a time so we can come to your office to help you.

## *The NAF Corner*

**Making the Workplace Safe.** Supervisors, managers and employees alike should make a conscious effort to maintain a safe working environment . Even though the primary responsibility for safety rests with Management, employees should be committed as well. Employees can assist by ensuring that the workplace is free of hazards by maintaining a clean work area; wiping-up spills, ensuring the use proper form when lifting a heavy load, or securing an electrical cord to prevent a work related injury.

Employees may assist in maintaining a safe environment by reporting any unsafe working conditions or practices to their supervisor. Below are 10 simple steps a supervisor can take to get employees involved in making the workplace safer.

1. Ownership – Give employees ownership for actions such as planning, conducting, inspecting and analyzing their own data on work hazards, and developing safety checklists.

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2. Leadership – Set the example by taking the same precautions expected of employees. Be conscious of potential hazards and be prepared to take protective measures.
3. Understanding – Provide employees with a thorough understanding of the potential personal health and safety risks.
4. Commitment – Strive to be committed to making safety a priority within the organization.
5. Goals – Set clear and concise goals consisting of firm standards and develop a strategy to enforce the standards.
6. Competence – Recognize and accept responsibility to train employees in order to reduce workplace hazards.
7. Feedback – Commend and recognize employees for identifying and reporting workplace hazards.
8. Teamwork – Consider safety a major focal point when encouraging teamwork among employees.
9. Responsiveness – Place emphasis on the need to respond promptly to identify workplace hazards.
10. Persistence – Remember accident prevention is an ongoing challenge that must be of primary focus every day.

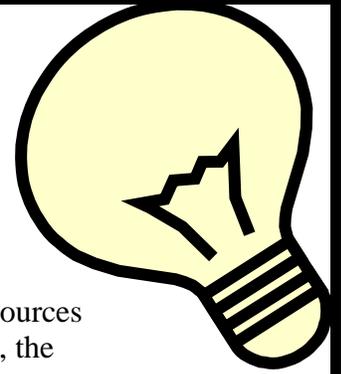
For additional information please contact your NAF HR Specialist.

**Employee Orientation.** Newly hired NAF employees are orientated with information that is fundamentally beneficial to their employment and position. Employees are briefed and provided copies of documents which include, but is not limited to, the Army's Mission, Vision and Values Statement; the sexual harassment and equal employment opportunity policies; information on the U.S. Constitution; and the Hatch Act. The items discussed during orientation provide each employee an in-depth knowledge and awareness of governmental practices and procedures. New employees are also briefed on specific issues relating to pay periods and pay dates, probationary periods, performance evaluations, awards, promotional opportunities, grievance procedures, and the procedure to be followed if injured on the job.

After employees have completed in-processing and are ready to report to their new workplace, they are given a NAF Supervisor's Orientation Checklist that must be

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completed by the immediate supervisor and returned to the NAF Human Resources Office within two weeks from the employee's entrance on duty date. Ideally, the Supervisor's Orientation Checklist serves as a tool for the supervisor to conduct employee orientation with their new employees. The checklist specifically outlines relevant topics to be discussed with the new employee. The supervisor acclimates the employee to the organization's mission, structure (chain of command), performance expectations as well as a litany of other topics -evaluation procedures, probationary period, posting of work schedules, hours of duty, leave scheduling and approval procedures, break policy, training, dress code, etc. .

Perhaps the most essential aspect of the employee's orientation is the discussion of the job assignment and the explanation of expectations. Once employees clearly understand what is expected of them and perform accordingly, organizational efficiency increases and the employee is more likely to feel engaged in the workplace.

For questions or inquiries regarding the NAF Supervisor's Orientation Checklist, please contact your servicing NAF Human Resources Office.

*BLANCHE D. ROBINSON*

*Human Resources Officer*

*Fort Benning CPAC*

*Phone: 545-1203 (Coml.); 835-1203 (DSN)*

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