
Defense Report

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When Federal Pay Does Not Rise To Meet Inflation—Good People Take Their Talents Elsewhere

The White House has announced that President Reagan will hold the annual cost-of-living adjustment to federal civil service pay at the 4.8 percent limit proposed in the budget for 1982. This decision was made in spite of the finding of the President's advisors that a 15.1 percent raise would be needed to bring the federal white collar employees into a position of comparability with the private sector. Quite understandably, the federal employee unions are viewing this decision with alarm.

The President has had to make some very hard decisions along the path toward a balanced budget and broad economic recovery. Few of the decisions have been universally popular and the President is to be commended on his determination to live up to his campaign promises but it seems this is an instance in which common sense and equity should overrule good intentions. The President's own talent hunters are having a difficult time finding qualified candidates for high-level appointive jobs in various federal agencies largely because actions by previous presidents and earlier congresses to put artificial ceilings on federal executive-level pay have denied top managers pay commensurate with their responsibilities. As was reported recently by *U.S. News and World Report*, many of the government's top career people are enduring non-competitive pay just long enough to reach the earliest possible retirement age and then taking their skills to industry and business.

Government bureaucracy at any level tends to attract criticism that is sometimes justified but more often is not. Civil servants operate within a framework of law and regulation written, sometimes poorly, by city councils, state legislatures and the congress. As our people have insisted that governments provide an ever-increasing number of services the public interface with bureaucracy has grown and we are more aware than ever before of the key roles our professional civil servants play in our lives.

If we insist on having our governments run efficiently we cannot expect efficient performance from an underpaid, disheartened work force whose members see prices soaring and private wages rising to meet them, while the gap between their own pay and the realities of living grows ever wider. Good government comes with a price tag we should all be willing to pay.

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