

If State Employees Were Overpaid, They Wouldn't Be Leaving for Better-Paying Jobs in the Private Sector

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Are Connecticut state workers overpaid? I don't think so. Connecticut state employees are about to get a retroactive, four-year contract that gives them a \$3,500 bonus, annual 2.5% pay increases and their "step increases" tied to seniority and their jobs.

By one estimate, this all works out to an additional \$10,000 per worker over four years.

Total cost to taxpayers: \$1.86 billion.

Watching the legislature debate this package I had to chuckle. Despite all the fuss and bluster, this now looks

like a sweetheart deal compared to what would be negotiated in today's era of hyper-inflation. Just 2.5%? A bargain!

State employees, at least the 46,000 represented in this SEBAC contract, are clearly well paid, in some cases making more than their counterparts in the private sector. Well paid, but not overpaid.

Why? Because state workers are still quitting in record numbers and their places are not getting filled. It's all about supply and demand.

Retirements from Hartford usually average about 2000 staffers a year. This year it's been 3400 so far with a flood of more retirements expected before July 1st when new rules take effect.

Where do these retirees go? Trust me, they're not sitting on a beach somewhere smoking Macanudos. Most go to work as consultants in "the private sector."

I still see my old friends from CDOT (from my almost 20 years on the Commuter Council) at meetings and events. They're still working in the transportation business but now they dress better and have nicer cars. And, of course, they took their fat state pensions with them.

But how is that any different than the cop or the firefighter who pads his final year with overtime and does the same thing, transitioning into a security job or opening a deli?

Are they any more overpaid than the dot-com code-writer who jumps from job to job for better money and perks? Or the investment banker who pulls down a good salary and still gets six figure annual bonuses? Are they overpaid?

And if these cushy state jobs are so great, why can't CDOT fill the 700 job openings it anticipates in the next few months? Sure, they're getting applications, but it isn't an easy sell.

These are crucial jobs affecting life and death. These are the engineers who design, build and inspect our bridges — and the electricians, mechanics and snow plow drivers who keep roads open in blizzards.

And if Connecticut is to get its fair share of federal infrastructure spending it must have people and plans in place now to grab the green. These will be exciting jobs at an historic moment of investment in our roads and rails, our electrical grid and water supply.

Fifty years ago I went to Lehigh University to become a civil engineer. I wanted to build the high speed trains of the future. Freshman calculus and chemistry persuaded me to change my major and I ended up in broadcasting and journalism.

But if I had it all to do over again, a job at CDOT right now would be pretty damn attractive.

Jim Cameron has been a Darien resident for more than 25 years. He is the founder of the [Commuter Action Group](#), sits on the [Merritt Parkway Conservancy](#) board and also serves on the Darien RTM and as program director for Darien TV79. You can reach him at CommuterActionGroup@gmail.com.