

# MIKE CAUSEY

## THE FEDERAL DIARY

### *Retirement Article Provokes Strong Reaction*

Nearly 200 federal workers and retirees have written or called to comment—most of them bitterly—on Wednesday's column about one of government's best benefits: retirement.

The column reprinted part of a piece by Washington writer James Bovard describing the U.S. retirement program as a gravy train and calling federal retirees aristocrats among the nation's senior citizens. Bovard noted that feds retire earlier than their private-sector counterparts and get bigger benefits.

He also said that many "double-dip"—by taking jobs outside government after they retire—and get Social Security benefits as well. The article appeared last month in the Viewpoints section of the Dallas Morning News and in newspapers in Los Angeles and San Diego.

Most of the Washington readers who contacted The Washington Post complained that the article presented a misleading picture of federal retirement benefits, although a few said it was an accurate accounting. Many, however, said they believed it was part of an administration media blitz aimed at whipping up political support for an assault on federal workers' fringe benefits.

After the piece appeared in the Dallas paper, Lud Andolsek, president of the National Association of Retired Federal Employees—who served on the Civil Service Commission under Democratic and Republican administrations—was allowed equal time in the Viewpoints section.

Andolsek called Bovard's piece "garbage" and challenged many of the facts presented. "He began on the note that a civil servant aged 55 with 30 years of service could retire on 'full pension,'" Andolsek wrote. "A civil servant may retire at those benchmarks, but he receives 56.25 percent of his highest three years' average salary. He must serve 41 years and 10 months to qualify for the maximum annuity of 80 percent."

Andolsek also called Bovard to task for saying that civil servants receive benefits three to four times those received by private sector retirees.

"Studies far more reputable than those conducted by the Grace Commission (the president's Private Sector Survey on Cost Controls) have shown that when the company pension benefit is combined with Social Security it usually replaces a greater portion of final salary than does civil service retirement based on identical salaries and 30 years of service," Andolsek said.

"[Bovard] said the most common retirement from civil service is 55,

but in private industry it is 63. Federal retirement records for the last 10 years show the average age at retirement has been 61.1. Among Fortune 500 companies it is 61.8."

"... He said federal pensions increased at a rate nearly double the inflation rate between 1969 and 1982. Federal retirement benefits have increased at exactly the rate of inflation."

"From 1986 to 1976 an extra percent was added to each inflation adjustment to compensate for the time lag between the price increase and annuity adjustments, but this advantage has been more than offset by income tax bracket creep."

"... He called civil servants 'double dippers' because some receive both Civil Service and Social Security benefits. He neglected to report (a) no federal retiree receives a Social Security benefit that was not earned by meeting all requirements of law and (b) that to the extent the retired civil servant has ever received a 'windfall' Social Security benefit, this advantage has already been remedied by Congress."

Andolsek said that pay freezes, rather than good retirement benefits, have been responsible for driving good employees from government, and that far from being broke, the Civil Service retirement fund now has assets of \$110 billion to "meet an annual payout of \$20 billion."

"It is important that people in the Washington area know what the out-of-town media is saying about our retirement system," an official of the retired federal employees association said. "But it is equally important that people out-of-town get the facts."

**Henry B. Frazier III** has been named acting chairman of the Federal Labor Relations Authority. He replaces Barbara J. Mahone, who returned to General Motors for a top job. Frazier, a longtime expert on the government's in-house labor scene, is expected to serve until at least after the election.

**The Society of Federal Linguists** and the Department of Education are sponsoring a career day Sept. 15 at Federal Office Building 6 (the Voice of America Building) on Maryland Avenue SW. Speakers will include top language services officials from the VOA, State Department, Central Intelligence Agency, Federal Bureau of Investigation and other agencies. Monday is the deadline for reservations. Call Everette Larson daytime at 287-5397, or evenings at 588-0995.