

Blaming the public employee

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It has become fashionable, especially among conservatives, to portray public employees as lazy and inefficient, as compared to private sector workers who are touted as hard working, efficient, and cost effective. In this invective, all public sector workers are lumped together— teachers, police, firemen, welfare workers, Social Security workers, etc.

This negative portrayal ignores the system where public employees work. Welfare workers, for example, are working for a system that encourages them to discourage applicants from applying, and hassles people after they are accepted for welfare. They get more credit for kicking people off the rolls than for accepting them on the rolls. The same is true for SSI workers. The system is set up to discourage people from applying. On the other hand, workers in the Social Security system generally don't discourage people from applying. They are expected to deliver benefits efficiently. Public benefit systems reflect society's and legislator's priorities and values.

Conservatives want everything to be privatized. Their bottom line is profits. When public services are privatized, as with welfare systems, the customer suffers because workers are fired and service is cut back.

Public workers are often inefficient and overly bureaucratic, but that is more of a political problem than an individual problem. Some systems are designed to serve the public well, some are designed to discourage people from applying.