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Michigan State Government Employment Sector: Are We in Line with the National Trends?

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THE CARL AND WINIFRED LEE HONORS COLLEGE

CERTIFICATE OF ORAL EXAMINATION

Thomas Walter Cronkright II, having been admitted to the Carl and Winifred Lee Honors College in 1995, successfully presented the Lee Honors College Thesis on April 16, 1997.

The title of the paper is:

"Michigan State Government Employment Sector: Are We In Line With the National Trends?"

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Wei-Chiao Huang", written over a horizontal line.


Dr. Wei-Chiao Huang
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A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Donald L. Alexander", written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Donald L. Alexander
Economics

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "David G. Houghton", written over a horizontal line.

Dr. David G. Houghton
Political Science



Michigan State
Government
Employment Sector:
Are we in line with
the national trends?

Thesis Committee:

Dr. Huang- Chair

Dr. Alexander- Member

Dr. Houghton-Member

Michigan State Government Employment Sector: Are we in line with the national trends?

State and Federal Employment Trends

This section of the paper deals with the trends of appropriated classified full-time equated (FTE) employees at both the state and federal level. The State of Michigan defines a classified employee as one whom the Civil Service Commission has jurisdiction pursuant to the State Constitution. A full-time equated position is calculated by totaling the hours worked by classified employees and dividing by 2,088. Since 2,088 hours of annual employment equal one FTE, then two part-time employees equate to one FTE.

In order to provide an accurate analysis of the changes in the level of classified FTE employment over this time period, the historical appropriated FTE data need to be adjusted . The first necessary adjustment involves classified FTE positions that have moved to an off budget status. This adjustment subtracts those employees which have been moved off budget from the total FTE budget to gain a more accurate FTE figure. Secondly, the data need to be adjusted for program transfers in which FTEs have been moved from one department to another department. **Table 1** provides a department-by-department summary of changes in the level of adjusted classified State FTEs for the period FY 1989-90 through FY 1995-96.

Table 1

GROWTH IN APPROPRIATED CLASSIFIED FTE POSITIONS				
(Number of FTEs)				
Department	FY 1989-90 Year-To-Date	FY 1995-96 Year-To-Date	FTE Number Change	FTE Percentage Change
Agriculture	633.0	582.5	(50.5)	(8.0)
Attorney General	503.4	528.5	25.1	5.0
Civil Rights	244.0	184.0	(60.0)	(24.6)
Civil Service	330.8	324.3	(6.5)	(2.0)
Commerce	2,206.7	2059.9	(146.8)	(6.7)
Corrections	14,439.4	16802.5	2,363.1	16.4
Education	876.3	728.3	(148.0)	(16.9)
Executive	64.0	75.0	11.0	17.2
Judiciary	1,738.5	1898.0	159.5	9.2
Labor	3,302.5	2938.5	(364.0)	(11.0)
Management and Budget	1,060.5	886.5	(174.0)	(16.4)
Mental Health	10,436.5	5803.0	(4,633.5)	(44.4)
Michigan Jobs Commission	1,165.5	1133.7	(31.8)	(2.7)
Military Affairs	905.0	1125.0	220.0	24.3
Natural Resources	3,575.1	3708.0	132.9	4.0
Public Health	1,514.3	1498.7	(15.6)	(1.0)
Social Services	14,657.5	14879.5	222.0	1.5
State	2,332.5	2094.9	(237.6)	(10.2)
State Police	3,479.5	3493.5	14.0	0.4
Transportation	4,189.9	3632.4	(557.5)	(13.3)
Treasury	1,964.5	1981.0	16.5	0.8
TOTAL FULL-TIME EQUATED POSITIONS	69,619.4	66,357.7	(3,261.70)	(4.7)

SOURCE: Senate Fiscal Agency

As **Table 1** shows, there have been radical changes in the make-up of State departments. For example, the employment in the Department of Mental Health was reduced by 4,634 FTEs or 44% from FY 1989-90 through FY 1995-96. By contrast, the Department of Corrections' employment was increased by 16.4% or 2,363 FTEs. The end result is a 4.7% decrease in the number of State FTEs. This

number needs to be compared with similar national data to provide a more accurate assessment when discussing Michigan's employment level.

Table 2 provides a summary of total employees on Federal Government payroll for years 1990 through 1996.

Table 2
EMPLOYEES ON FEDERAL GOVERNMENT PAYROLL
Start of Year Seasonally Adjusted Totals
(in Thousands)

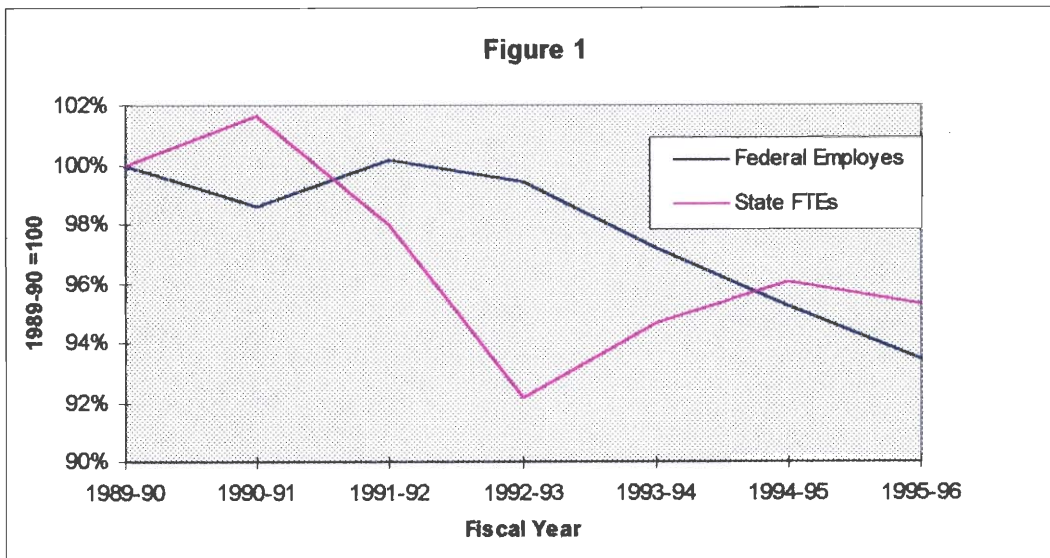
Year	Number of Employees	Employee Number Change	Employee Percentage Change
Jan. 1990	2,984	-	-
1991	2,942	(42.0)	(1.4)
1992	2,990	48.0	1.6
1993	2,966	(24.0)	(1.0)
1994	2,901	(65.0)	(2.2)
1995	2,841	(60.0)	(2.1)
1996	2,788	(53.0)	(1.9)
AVERAGE EMPLOYEE TOTALS	2916	(28.0)	(1.0)
TOTAL CHANGE FROM 1990 through 1996		(196.0)	(6.5)

SOURCE: Federal Civilian Workforce Statistics

Between years 1990 and 1996, there has been an overall decrease of 6.5% in employment of Federal employees. This compares with 4.7% decline that Michigan realized. This comparison suggests Michigan is in line with, or slightly lagging, the national trend of employee reduction. What factors can help explain the steady decline in the number of public sector workers at both the State and Federal level? First, as wages rise in the private sector, many public sector employees may enter the private sector in pursuit of higher wages and enhanced benefits. Secondly, in the early 1990's, the US was in the depth of

recession. This recession caused budget imbalances for the Federal Government and many State Governments as tax inflows decreased due to overall decline in income levels of taxpayers. The Federal Government faced a mounting deficit which may have been the catalyst to trim the “fat” (excess labor) out of certain governmental departments in order to make them more efficient. Likewise, in 1991, Governor Engler initiated a hiring freeze for the State of Michigan. The goal of the hiring freeze was to limit the rate of growth in state employment. Both the actions of the Federal and State government paralleled the private sector’s “downsizing” trends as companies reduced the number of employees in order to cut costs and remain competitive. The public sector may have been forced to adapt more efficient operating strategies in order to meet objectives while under fixed budget constraints. The final possible explanation for the steady employment decline is that of technological advancement. Currently we live in an information and technology society. There has never been a time in our nation’s history where the availability of information has been so great. The way in which people process information has radically changed through the development of high-power computers and sophisticated programs. More of these technological advancements have taken place since the early 1990’s. As computers become more capable of performing people-related tasks, the need for workers decreases. This could explain how the Federal and State Governments have replaced people with computers and reduced the overall number of workers.

The computation of adjusted State FTE transfers enables us to make a comparison of adjusted State FTE employees with Federal employee data. **Figure 1** provides a comparison of indexed growth since FY 1990-95 of adjusted State FTE employees and Federal employee numbers. Over the seven-fiscal year period, adjusted State FTE employees have decreased by 4.7%, while the number of Federal employees has decreased by 6.5%.



The Federal trend line gradually decreases while the Michigan trend line declines sharply from FY 1990-91 through 1992-93, followed by an increase in the following fiscal years. This sharp decline is the result of the 1991 State mandated hiring freeze imposed by Governor Engler¹. The hiring freeze prohibits State departments from hiring new State classified employees to fill vacant classified positions that might have occurred as a result of terminations, resignations, or retirements. This explains the drastic decrease in State FTE percentages from FY 1990-91 to FY 1992-93. In order to explain the increase in State FTE percentages, one must understand the second element of the hiring freeze. Under the Executive Directive, the Director of the Department of Management and Budget (DMB) is required to grant exceptions to this freeze when the Director believes that “failing to fill positions will result in rendering a state department or agency unable to deliver basic services, cause loss of revenue to the state, result in the inability of the state to receive and expand federal funds, or would necessitate additional expenditures that exceed any savings from maintaining the vacancy.” The appropriation bills also provide that the hiring freeze does not apply to classified positions that are funded with 80% or more of Federal or State restricted funds². This exception to the hiring freeze may explain the gradual increase in employment between FY 1992-93 and FY 1995-96.

Cost of State Employees

While there has been a decrease in the number of employees hired at the State and Federal levels, the cost of each employee has risen steadily in recent years. During the most recent seven-fiscal year period for which employment data are available, FY 1987-88 through FY 1993-94, Michigan State expenditures for classified employees increased by 32.4%. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) was 113.6 in 1987, and increased to 148.2 in 1994. This represents a 30.5% increase in the cost of living over the five year period³. These data show that Michigan expenditures grew at a higher rate than the CPI. This section of the paper provides some basic financial information about the cost incurred by the State in supporting the classified workforce. In addition, the cost of Michigan State employees will be compared to that of the Federal Government and other private sectors.

The total cost of Classified State employees has steadily increased in recent years. **Table 3** provides a summary of the expenditures on classified employee compensation for the period of FY 1983-84 through FY 1993-94.

Table 3

TOTAL CLASSIFIED STATE EMPLOYEE COMPENSATION (Millions of Dollars)		
Fiscal Year	Total Employee Compensation	Average Annual Growth
1983-84	\$ 1,900	7.34%
1984-85	2,030	6.84%
1985-86	2,200	8.37%
1986-87	2,390	8.64%
1987-88	2,500	4.60%
1988-89	2,610	4.40%
1989-90	2,830	8.43%
1990-91	2,990	5.65%
1991-92	3,120	4.35%
1992-93	3,200	2.56%
1993-94	3,310	3.44%

SOURCE: Michigan Department of Civil Service

Compensation includes all wages and salaries and all fringe benefits provided to employees. Fringe benefits consist primarily of health insurance, social security and Medicare payments, and the cost incurred by the State in funding the pension systems. Between the years 1991-92 and 1992-93 the average annual growth in State employee compensation declined from 4.35% to 2.56%. This change is equivalent to a (41.15%) change in annual growth. Again, this sharp decline may be related to the implementation of the hiring freeze. The hiring freeze restricts the ability for individual departments to hire new, or replace retired workers. This forced many departments to become more efficient by searching for more productive ways to complete tasks with fewer resources.

Table 4 provides a summary of total employee costs incurred by the Federal Government.

Table 4

TREND OF FEDERAL CIVILIAN PAYROLL (Thousands of Dollars)		
Fiscal Year	Total Payroll (United States)	Average Annual Growth
1983	\$54,600,973	
1984	\$58,342,222	6.85%
1985	\$62,132,254	6.50%
1986	\$63,634,640	2.42%
1987	\$66,286,360	4.17%
1988	\$70,999,191	7.11%
1989	\$74,753,119	5.29%
1990	\$79,414,470	6.24%
1991	\$83,130,337	4.68%
1992	\$86,888,870	4.52%
1993	\$91,893,667	5.76%
1994	\$93,865,222	2.15%

SOURCE: Federal Civilian Workforce Statistics

As both **Table 3** and **Table 4** illustrate, the total cost of both Federal and State employees have risen substantially. The data also reveals that for the State of Michigan in FY 1993-94, the total cost of classified employee compensation stood at \$3.3 billion. From FY 1983-84 to FY 1993-94 the total increase in Michigan employee compensation was 74.12%. The Federal compensation total increased by 71.89% during the same period. The 2.23% greater increase in Michigan State employee compensation costs than the Federal Government over the period may be explained by union membership. **Table 5** and **Table 6** provide a summary of union membership for years 1983-1994, in Michigan and in the US., respectively.

Table 5

UNION MEMBERSHIP BY SECTOR IN MICHIGAN: 1983-1994 (Thousands of Workers)						
Year	Membership			Membership as a Percent(%) of all Workers		
	Total	Private Sector	Public Sector	Total	Private Sector	Public Sector
1983	1,005	702	303	30.4	25.3	56.8
1985	1,004	707	297	28.4	23.5	56.8
1989	1,013	668	345	26.0	20.2	58.1
1990	974	654	320	25.4	20.2	54.2
1991	924	602	322	24.7	19.1	55.4
1992	972	626	346	25.6	19.6	57.8
1993	962	606	356	24.6	18.5	56.0
1994	961	632	329	23.8	18.3	56.0
Average	981	657	324	26.4	20.9	56.2

SOURCE: Michigan Employment Security Commission, Research and Statistics, Current Population Survey.

Table 6 provides a summary of Union membership for the U.S. for years 1983-1994.

Table 6

U.S. LABOR UNION MEMBERSHIP, BY SECTOR: 1983-1994 (Thousands of Workers)						
Year	Membership			Membership as a Percent(%) of all Workers		
	Total	Private Sector	Public Sector	Total	Private Sector	Public Sector
1983	17,717	11,980	5,737	20.1	16.5	36.7
1985	16,996	11,253	5,743	18.0	14.3	35.7
1989	16,961	10,536	6,425	16.4	12.3	36.7
1990	16,740	10,255	6,485	16.1	11.9	36.5
1991	16,568	9,937	6,631	16.1	11.7	36.9
1992	16,390	9,737	6,653	15.8	11.4	36.6
1993	16,598	9,580	7,018	15.8	11.1	37.7
1994	16,740	9,649	7,091	15.5	10.8	38.7
Average	16,839	10,366	6,473	16.7	12.5	36.9

SOURCE: The Bureau of National Affairs, Inc.

The data presented in Table 5 and Table 6 provide the statistics which may explain the different growth rate in employee compensation costs between the State and Federal government. When comparing the two tables, it is clear that Michigan, as compared to the U.S., is much more unionized. 26.4% of all

Michigan workers are unionized. When compared to U.S. statistics, Michigan is 9.7% more unionized than the national average. Furthermore, the Michigan public sector is on average 56.2% unionized, while the average public sector union membership of the U.S. as a whole is 36.9%. When comparing the public sector, there is a 19.3% difference in the average percent of public workers who belong to unions. The strong union presence in Michigan can be explained by several factors. First, the Michigan economy is largely affected by the auto industry. The auto industry hires thousands of Michigan residents and in doing so makes them members of the United Auto Workers (UAW) union. The UAW is a strong force in the Michigan employment sector. On average a Michigan production worker makes \$16.13 per hour⁴ while the average U.S. production worker makes only \$12.06 per hour⁴. Michigan has the highest average production wage in the nation. Given these data, it is clear the UAW has increased union membership and average wages for the Michigan production worker. Secondly, the Michigan Education Association (MEA), is the union for all primary and secondary teachers working in public institutions. Information about the MEA membership was obtained via a personal phone conversation. An employee of the MEA Membership Department estimated the total number of active MEA members to be 117,316. The total number of union members for the state of Michigan is 960,609. Therefore the MEA accounts for 12.2% of all union members in Michigan⁵. Furthermore, the MEA makes up 35.6% of all public union members⁵. The strong presence of the MEA may help to explain why Michigan's public sector is more unionized than the nation as a whole. Finally, the level of unionization in Michigan may be related to educational attainment. On average, 20.3% of all Americans have earned a bachelor's degree or higher, and another 7.2% have earned advanced degrees⁶. These statistics are much lower for Michigan which had only 17.4% of its citizens with Bachelor's degree or higher and just 6.4% with advanced degrees⁷. Many private sector union jobs require little or no college education. Production workers for the auto industry are not required

to have a degree for employment. The structure of the auto industry provides many Michigan workers a stable and well paying career as an alternative to college.

Table 7 provides a breakdown of the components of classified employee compensation costs in FY 1993-94. Wages and salaries accounted for 68.0% of the total compensation cost while the entire fringe benefit package equaled the remaining 32.0% of the total compensation cost.

Table 7

FY 1993-94 CLASSIFIED EMPLOYEE TOTAL COMPENSATION (Millions of Dollars)		
Type of Compensation	Dollar Amount	Percentage of Total Compensation
Wages and Salaries.....	\$2,250	68.0%
Social Security and Medicare.....	166	5.0%
Group Insurances.....	403	12.2%
Retirement Payments.....	345	10.4%
All Other.....	146	4.4%
TOTAL COMPENSATION.....	\$3,310	100.0%

SOURCE: Michigan Department of Civil Service

While these numbers reflect Michigan's compensation structure, are they unique to Michigan? Or is it a reflection of the trends realized at the Federal level? **Table 8** provides a compensation breakdown for the Federal Executive branch for FY 1993-94.

Table 8

FY 1993-94 EXECUTIVE BRANCH EMPLOYEE TOTAL COMPENSATION (Millions of Dollars)		
Type of Compensation	Dollar Amount	Percentage of Total Compensation
Wages and Salaries.....	\$100,756	71.9%
Social Security and Medicare.....	4,534	3.2%
Group Insurances.....	7,516	5.4%
Retirement Payments.....	10,323	7.4%
All Other.....	17,010	12.1%
TOTAL COMPENSATION.....	\$140,139	100.0%

SOURCE: Work Years and Personnel Costs Survey

The data in Table 7 and Table 8 illustrate how employee compensation consists of much more than employees' salaries. The data does reveal that 32.0% of Michigan classified employee compensation is comprised of employee benefits. While 28.1% of Federal executive branch employee compensation is made up of employee benefits. This suggests that Michigan may provide relatively better employee benefits. However it may also indicate that Michigan may be paying too much for its health plan or pension fund programs.

While wages and salaries have continued to grow over recent years, fringe benefits appear to be the source of major cost pressures associated with State classified employees. Table 9 provides a summary of fringe benefit expenditures as a percentage of total wages and salaries for the period FY 1989-90 through FY 1994-95. Table 9 points to the fact that fringe benefit costs over this time period have increased from 33.4% of wages and salaries in FY 1989-90 to 47.1% in FY 1994-95. Driving these increases in fringe benefit costs have been the categories of group insurances and pension benefits. Group

insurance costs have increased from 13.2% of wages and salaries in FY 1989-90 to 18.0% in FY 1994-95. These cost increases are generally driven by increases in health care costs.

The fastest growing area of fringe benefit cost increases is in pension costs. The State's contribution to various State employee retirement systems has soared from 9.5% of wages and salaries in FY 1989-90 to 18.5% in FY 1994-95. This increase in pension cost, as a percentage of total wages and salary expenses, is estimated to have added over \$200 million to total employment costs in FY 1994-95 as compared with FY 1989-90.

Table 9

CLASSIFIED EMPLOYEE FRINGE BENEFITS AS A PERCENT OF WAGES AND SALARIES					
Fiscal Year	Social Security	Group Insurances	Pension Benefits	All Other	Total Benefits
1989-90	7.35%	13.21%	9.53%	3.36%	33.45%
1990-91	7.40%	14.27%	11.13%	4.22%	37.02%
1991-92	7.43%	15.70%	13.56%	4.20%	40.89%
1992-93	7.94%	19.63%	18.95%	4.13%	50.65%
1993-94	7.38%	18.98%	17.95%	2.86%	47.17%
1994-95	7.28%	18.00%	18.48%	3.32%	47.08%

SOURCE: Michigan Department of Civil Service

Table 10 provides a summary of the average cost of providing compensation for a classified State employee during FY 1994-95. The average compensation cost in FY 1994-95 was \$52,567. Average wages and salaries equaled \$35,740 while fringe benefits totaled \$16,827 per classified employee.

Table 10

ANNUAL COST OF AVERAGE STATE CLASSIFIED EMPLOYEE FISCAL YEAR 1994-95	
Component of Total Compensation	Annual Cost
Wages.....	\$35,740
Social Security Payments.....	2,602
Group Insurances.....	6,433
Pension Costs.....	6,605
All Others.....	1,187
TOTAL EMPLOYEE COST.....	\$52,567

SOURCE: Michigan Department of Civil Service

Table 11 provides a summary of the recent history of average classified employee salaries. During FY 1989-90 the average classified employee salary was \$31,426. By FY 1994-95 the average classified employee salary had increased by \$4,044 or 12.9%. Over the same time period inflation as measured by the Detroit Consumer Price Index increased by 15.4%.

The level of average classified employee salaries has stabilized in recent years. For the three year period FY 1989-90 through FY 1991-92 salaries increased by an annual average of 4.3%. During the three-year period FY 1992-93 through FY 1994-95 salaries increased by an annual average of 0.7%.

Table 11

STATE CLASSIFIED EMPLOYEE AVERAGE SALARIES		
Fiscal Year	Average Salary	Percentage Change
1989-90	\$31,426	1.9%
1990-91	33,565	6.8
1991-91	34,952	4.1
1992-93	34,917	-0.1
1993-93	35,029	0.3
1994-95	35,740	2.0

SOURCE: Michigan Department of Civil Service

Conclusion and discussion

This paper attempts to provide a better understanding of the Michigan public employment sector. The charts and tables presented differentiate Michigan from the Federal Government. The information for the U.S. Federal Government is provided to facilitate a comparison between Michigan trends and the trends of the entire nation. These comparisons provide a challenging platform by which to analyze and argue certain trends. The final result is a set of distinctions which set Michigan apart from the nation as a whole. First, the hiring freeze placed on Michigan State Departments sharply reduced employment growth levels while the U.S. growth levels remained relatively higher. Secondly, the higher levels of employee compensation in Michigan may be explained through a greater union participation rate in Michigan than in the nation as a whole. Finally, Michigan's State employee benefit package costs slightly more than that of the Executive Branch of the U.S. Government. This difference suggests Michigan either provides a superior benefits package as compared to the U.S. Executive Branch, or it pays a premium for the benefits it provides to employees. The explanations for the statistical differences between the State and the Federal Government are only plausible explanations. Hopefully, this paper will inspire others to probe for a deeper understanding of the material which was presented.

FOOTNOTES

- 1) Senate Fiscal Agency. Issue Paper. Michigan State Government Employment Trends. April, 1996, 9.
- 2) Senate Fiscal Agency. Issue Paper, 9.
- 3) U.S. Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1996 (116th edition.) Washington, DC, 1996, 483.
- 4) "Earnings by Occupation and Education": 1990 Census of Population and Housing: Summary Tape File 22C. CD-ROM. U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1990 Census of Population and Housing: Summary Tape 22C/Boca Raton/ Delray Beach, FL, MSA/ Average Hourly Earnings of Production Workers in Manufacturing/ U.S. and Michigan 1990.
- 5) Michigan Employment Security Commission, Michigan Statistical Abstract - 1996 Edition (Detroit, Michigan: 1996). Published by the University of Michigan Press (Ann Arbor, Michigan), 198.
- 6) U.S. Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 395.
- 7) Michigan Employment Security Commission, Michigan Statistical Abstract - 1996 Edition, 161.

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