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RELEASE: SEPTEMBER 26, 1978

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WEALTHY WASHINGTON, D.C.

What is the wealthiest metropolitan area in the United States? What is the area where the average household income is $27,702 -- about one-third above the national average? What is the area that is almost recession-proof, where unemployment is far below the rest of the country, where it's nearly impossible to be fired, and where workers do not worry about being laid off]

What is the only large U.S. city that is booming? What is the area where the average price of an existing home is $80,600 (some $30,000 above the national average), and where the favorite topic of conversation at dinner parties is the "ki 11 ing " people make when se11 i ng their homes?

While other major U.S. cities are suffering from urban decay and boarded-up buildings, what is the only major city where there are no abandoned buildings or vacant lots? What is the area where the cost of a new office building can skyrocket from an estimated $48 million to $123 million, but everyone makes money and nobody loses?

What is the area where per capita federal aid is more than $1,000 per year? What is the area where workers' fringe benefits include such luxuries as the use of a WATS line to make free long-distance telephone calls?

What is the one area where inflation results in windfall profits because it generates income tax receipts at a faster rate than purchasing power is declining? What is the one area where the energy crisis is not an economic detriment but an asset which creates 19,000 new jobs (in the Department of Energy)?

Are we talking about a utopia of which dreamers and philosophers are wont to write? No, such a land really exists. It's called Washington, D.C., our nation's capital. While the rest of the country tightens its belt in the face of the shrinking dollar, Washington, D.C. grows ric er and richer. TIME Magazine calls it a "privileged ghetto, home of a pampered class."

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If Washin ton's prosperity were real wealth generated out of production, we could rejoice in its success. The trouble is that Washington's wealth is acquired by picking your pockets in order to pay the cost of the taxpayer-financed federal bureaucracy.

Washington, D.C. can be considered a "company town." The federal government employs 38.3 percent of those working in the District. The service industry, which is closely aligned with the federal government, employs another 25.5 percent. Employ ment trends project an even larger share for the federal portion in the future.

Federal employees are paid on a principle called "comparability." This means that they are supposed to be paid the same as those doing comparable jobs in the private sector. This formula, however, is subject to the defect called "grade inflation." That means that federal teams write inflated descriptions of federal jobs that, on paper, justify higher grade levels, and therefore higher salaries.

It's a great system. Pay raises result, not from more efficiency, but from bigger and better job descriptions. The attractiveness of federal jobs, through "comparability" salaries plus generous fringe benefits, is shown by the fact that last year 11,921,964 persons inquired about getting a federal job.

Another reason the average household income is so high is that so many married couples have both husband and wife on the federal payroll and together they earn in excess of $100,000 per year. (An example was Peter Bourne and his wife prior to his recent abrupt departure from the White House staff.)

A third reason the average Washington-area income is so high is that the federal government spends $80 billion in contracts with non-governmental agencies. This is a favorite way to pay individual salaries exceeding $100,000 per year, far beyond the federal pay-scale limit of $58,245.

One out of five Americans is now working for the government. The other four out of five Americans are working hard to support the new affluent, privileged class. They are paying more and liking it less. No wonder there's a tax revolt brewing.

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