FEDERAL EMPLOYMENT EXPECTED TO RISE

The AP reports it is unlikely that President Barack Obama will lay off any of the nearly 2 million federal civil servants in the middle of the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. His proposed $800-plus billion economic aid plan, which includes heavy spending on public works, is expected to increase the ranks of federal workers, although mostly at the state and local level. That measure is working its way through Congress just as Microsoft, Pfizer, Caterpillar, Home Depot and scores of other companies are shedding workers, and governors are asking or ordering state workers to accept furloughs, salary reductions, truncated workweeks or reduced benefits. "Federal belt-tightening would worsen the problem right now," said Kevin Hassett, director of economic policy studies at the conservative American Enterprise Institute. "Most economists agree that the federal government is a built-in stabilizer." Simply letting federal workers go is "penny-wise and pound foolish," said Max Stier, president of the Partnership for Public Service. "We had a situation where we had a single person monitoring toys coming in from abroad. End result: You get lead-tainted toys coming in to the country," Stier said. "We need people looking out for the public good." The government's civilian, nonmilitary work force peaked in the late 1960s at about 2.3 million. It was 2 million or more through the mid-1990s, when the government cut more than 400,000 jobs, many through military base closings. Since 2001, civilian employment in the executive branch, excluding postal employees, has edged upward from 1.7 million to about 2 million, largely because of new homeland security jobs. And more federal job openings are on the horizon. A new report predicts that more than 90% of the 3 million to 4 million jobs that Obama proposes to save or create would be in the private sector. But the report also estimates that 244,000 government jobs, some at the federal level, but more at the state and local level, would be created or saved. That was based on a $600 billion stimulus package; the one being debated in Congress is more than $800 billion.