

So what's wrong with that?

On the one hand, nothing. Society will always need civil engineers, police officers, and welfare case workers, not to mention teachers. Historically, these jobs have paid relatively well. Indeed, there is now some resentment against government workers as being overpaid, especially in terms of benefits such as pensions and health care. On average²³ (as of 2010) 15.3% of American workers are employed by government at all levels, ranging from 27% in Alaska to 11.9% in Pennsylvania.

In the New Normal there are not as many government jobs as there used to be, and those jobs are increasingly unattractive. That message hasn't gotten through to colleges yet, who continue to prepare students for unrealistic job opportunities. We've already mentioned forensic science—a category where student interest is completely out of whack with available jobs. Students who aspire to jobs in environmental protection or astrophysics are similarly likely to be disappointed.

Two big government agencies are shedding jobs. Active duty military personnel decreased from over 2 million in 1990 to just under 1.4 million today. Similarly, the postal service has shrunk from 760,000 employees in 1987 to 490,000 today. Especially for postal employees, future prospects are grim.²⁴

A big reason for the decline in these agencies is technological disruption. E-mail and other electronic communications have reduced first class mail volume by half. Even so-called *junk mail* has been declining in volume, though not as dramatically, displaced by the Internet. Military personnel are increasingly replaced by robots, such as drone aircraft.

Many government services are being automated. Dan, for example, recently renewed his driver's license over the web. Welfare checks have been replaced by EBT cards, with similar arrangements made for social security payments. While government responds more slowly to cost-saving technology than private business, it does respond. Large numbers of