

Enid News & Eagle

Contractors Offers Voluntary Cost Reduction to Help Cut Flight Instructor Simulator Costs

By Jeff Mullin August 31, 2010

ENID — The contractor whose employees provide flight simulator training at Vance Air Force Base has offered to help the Department of Defense cut its costs if it abandons its earlier decision to convert the instructors to government employees.

The Defense Department is in the process of hiring 76 simulator instructors to take jobs now held by employees of Lear Siegler Services Inc., a private contracting company, at Vance.

This is the result of Resource Management Decision 802, announced more than a year ago by Defense Secretary Robert Gates. RMD 802 called for hiring 34,000 civil service workers in place of contractors over the next five years. The change, which Gates said was being made to save taxpayers money, was to take place by Oct. 1, the beginning of the next fiscal year.

However, last month Gates announced the in-sourcing process was being halted because the anticipated savings were not being realized.

In an e-mail to Air Education and Training Command officials, Kevin M. Denny, vice president of contracts for URS Federal Support Services, Inc., the parent company of Lear Siegler Services, offered to waive the 60-day advanced notice of intent to exercise the next contract option, to “explore all avenues with the intent of offering a voluntary cost reduction on the contract to generate the anticipated savings on the contract associated with the in-sourcing initiative,” and offered to “work closely with the contracting office to assist them in meeting their 10 percent cuts in each of the out years in this program.”

As yet there has been no response, said Jack “Pappy” Beam, Lear Siegler Services site manager at Vance.

“We offered that to the Air Force,” he said. “We offered to help them meet their 10 percent goal, to take 10 percent less for the contract. URS did that and they are still not accepting us.”

The Defense Department originally estimated converting contract sim instructors to government employees would save \$480,000 over five years. But the Air Force did its own study and discovered in-sourcing actually would cost taxpayers \$27.5 million.

“Is the government trying to save money with this contract?” Beam said. “If they are why haven’t they answered this e-mail? Why haven’t they said something?”

Simulator instructors at Vance and other UPT bases like Laughlin AFB, Texas, and Columbus AFB, Miss., were told they would have to re-apply for their jobs and there was no guarantee they would be rehired. This left instructors with 15 years of sim experience and thousands of hours of military flight time without jobs.

Some 10 percent of Vance’s 85 contract simulator instructors and support personnel will not be rehired as government employees. Those who are rehired will take an average pay cut of \$18,000. The additional costs to the government will come as the result of government-funded retirement plans and rigid overtime rules. Ken Sumpter, president of the Vance Instructor Association, estimates the impact to the local economy to be between \$1.5 to \$2 million if in-sourcing is not halted.

State Sen. Patrick Anderson, along with U.S. Sens. Tom Coburn and Jim Inhofe, and U.S. Rep. Frank Lucas, have spoken out against the in-sourcing plan.

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