



DoD Too Slow in Assessing Workforce Needs

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The Department of Defense has made progress in developing a civilian workforce plan, but not much. That is according to testimony from a Government Accountability Office official before the House Armed Services Committee on Capitol Hill Thursday.

A GAO examination of DoD's workforce planning processes found that the department identified 22 categories of mission critical occupations performed by civilians. But of those, said Brenda Farrell, GAO's director of defense capabilities and management, DoD has completed a "gap analysis" with respect to only of three of them: information technology, languages and logistics.

A "gap analysis" refers to the process of identifying where current and future skills among the workforce may fall short of requirements.

"The need for the department to address these gaps is undermining its ability to fulfill vital missions," she added.

For this, among other reasons, Farrell said that the GAO identified human capital management as a high-risk area for DoD.

Rep. Howard McKeon, (R-Calif.), chairman of the committee, targeted shortfalls in the acquisition workforce. He said the department suffered from a "lack of trained acquisitions personnel."

"Over the years Congress has provided the Defense Department with flexible tools to improve the acquisitions workforce," he said. "To date, we have seen nothing but arbitrary decisions made without any guiding principles in place. Congress has had to step in because DoD has not paid sufficient attention" to Congress' wishes.

Keith Charles, the Pentagon's director of human capital initiatives, defended DoD's progress on acquisition, noting that "since 2009, the department has reversed the decline in the acquisition workforce."

DoD added 8,600 acquisition personnel out of a contemplated 20,000, Charles said. He added DoD will hire more in the coming years.

"This will come in two parts," he said. "Ten-thousand of this growth is supported by the Defense Acquisition Workforce Development Fund. We will finish this growth."

The other 10,000 is part of an insourcing initiative. DoD increased its workforce by 2,200 by bringing contractor jobs back in house. Charles said future insourcing "will be on a case-by-case basis."

He added that the key strategic challenge for DoD when it comes to acquisition involves "ensuring the readiness of the mid-career acquisitions workforce in the 5-to-10 year horizon. We need to focus on that and fix that before it becomes a disaster."

GAO's Farrell, in response to a question from Rep. Larry Kissell (D-N.C.), reiterated that gap analysis was the key process for future workforce planning to "identify the skills you need to have that you don't have on board."

The problem with DoD's progress in this area is that it may be too slow to do any good.

"We would like see all 22 occupational categories completed but at this rate it will take years," she said. "We would like to see how they can complete this earlier."

Rep. Vicky Hartzler (R-Mo.) said the gap analysis needs to be done more quickly.

"Otherwise, by the time it gets done the skills will have changed and you are caught in a perpetual loop," she said.

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