Sen. Anderson at Odds with Proposed In-sourcing of Flight Simulator Jobs at Vance AFB

By Jeff Mullin, Senior Writer   *August 19, 2010*

ENID — The Department of Defense's plan to "in-source" flight simulator instructor jobs at Vance Air Force Base and other undergraduate pilot training bases has drawn fire from Enid's state senator.

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. The change was to take place by Oct. 1, the beginning of the next fiscal year.

However earlier this month Gates announced the in-sourcing process was being halted.

"As we were reducing contractors, we weren't seeing the savings we had hoped from in-sourcing," Gates told govexec.com. "With regard to in-sourcing, other than changes planned for fiscal 2010, no more full-time positions in these organizations will be created after this fiscal year to replace contractors."

That leaves Vance simulator instructors wondering what will happen to them, since their positions were not supposed to fall under the auspices of the Defense Department until the next fiscal year.

State Sen. Patrick Anderson, R-Enid, agrees in-sourcing would end up costing taxpayers millions of dollars.

"This is the kind of bureaucratic bungling that has destroyed the public's trust in the federal government," he said. "Despite claims that this plan would save more than $480,000 over five years, it will actually end up costing taxpayers another $27.5 million — and that's based on the Air Force's own numbers."

A letter to Air Force Secretary Michael Donley from Lear Siegler Services site manager Jack "Pappy" Beam and Vance Instructor Association President Kenneth Sumpter urges the effort to in-source Vance simulator instructor jobs be halted and the Lear Siegler Services contract be renewed, "and that a fiscal re-analysis be accomplished over the next year to positively ensure that a conversion to federal employees is cost-effective and warranted."

Anderson said U.S. Sens. Tom Coburn and Jim Inhofe, as well as U.S. Rep. Frank Lucas, have joined him in speaking out against the plan to make the contract simulator instructor jobs government positions.

"The Obama administration has directed that the private sector jobs be in-sourced and the individuals who are performing the jobs will then become government employees," Anderson said. "You will have the same people doing the same work they are doing today — it will just cost the taxpayers a whole lot more."

Vance already has seen some in-sourcing, with civilian contract security forces officers being replaced by Department of Defense security officers beginning last September.

The Lear Siegler Services representatives' letter to Donley cited a number of negative effects of the conversion from contract simulator instructors to Defense Department civilians, including the fact each current employee stands to take a $7,000 to $25,000 pay cut and the resulting loss of retirement benefits. That, the letter says, will significantly reduce local tax revenues. Because of hiring practices and restrictions, the letter states, some 10 to 15 percent of current employees will not be rehired, resulting in increased costs of training new simulator instructors.

"In this period of economic uncertainty," the letter states, "it makes little sense to increase the government's expense and taxpayer liability, while lowering personal incomes, lowering tax revenues for our communities, putting current employees out of work and shouldering the cost of training replacement employees."

The in-sourcing plan, Anderson said, "is part of the Obama administration's attempt to create an illusion that their policies have created new jobs. Otherwise it makes absolutely no sense."