



Senators Fight DoD Hiring Freeze

By Jory Heckman

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The Defense Department is looking at a hiring freeze, but some senators say DoD may be breaking laws that protect employees against such head counts.

A coalition of Democratic senators, led by Sen. Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.), have sent a letter to Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, urging him to reconsider his current plan to freeze the number of federal employees at 2010 fiscal year levels.

Mikulski, along with Sens. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa), Claire McCaskill, (D-Mo.), Patty Murray (D-Wash.) and Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio), suggest that instead of keeping a meticulous head count, Panetta should manage the size of the federal workforce with cost and workload in mind.

"Placing an arbitrary headcount on the number of federal employees at the DoD is not the way to make the department run more efficiently," Mikulski wrote in the letter. "Our federal employees are on the front lines every day, working hard for America. These hardworking men and women deserve to be treated fairly and should not be prevented from performing essential DOD functions because of an arbitrary headcount."

This practice, the senators argue, goes against laws that restrict DOD's ability to put a head count on the size of the work force.

Unable to hire under the freeze, service contractors would have to be hired to complete any new government work.

"I am very concerned that the proposed Department of Defense employee freeze will negatively impact the essential work being done to keep our country safe," Murray wrote. "It would be very problematic if this employee freeze resulted in even more government work being outsourced to contractors."

"I believe we can and must find greater efficiencies in the Pentagon, and I hope Secretary Panetta will continue that effort," McCaskill wrote. "We need to be smart about how we do it by looking at places like service contracts and poor acquisitions practices - not doing it arbitrarily on the backs of federal employees who are performing core governmental functions."

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