



AFGE CALLS PENTAGON TO TASK OVER ARBITRARY WORKFORCE CUTS

Tens of thousands of federal workers to lose their jobs as contractor spending grows

WASHINGTON, Nov 17, 2011 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- The nation's largest federal employee union is calling on the Defense Department to explain why it's forcing thousands of civilian workers out of their jobs even as it ramps up spending on costly government contractors. The Army plans to cut its civilian workforce by more than 9,560 positions by the end of September, while the Air Force plans to cut 13,500 positions.

American Federation of Government Employees National President John Gage said the union has grave concerns about how these cuts are being carried out. The Pentagon has arbitrarily capped the civilian workforce at 2010 levels, which will require cutting tens of thousands of civilian positions. Meanwhile, spending on service contractors would actually increase by billions of dollars under this administration's fiscal 2012 budget request, particularly contract spending on advisory and assistance services as well as operations and maintenance of equipment and facilities.

"Our members are concerned that the Defense Department is breaking laws by arbitrarily cutting civilian jobs and, in some instances, directly converting that work to private-sector contractors," Gage said. "Pentagon officials can't explain which functions are being eliminated or downsized, how these decisions were made, how the work is going to get done with fewer federal employees and whether work performed by displaced federal employees will simply be contracted out.

"We are also concerned that contractors are not being required to make comparable sacrifices," Gage said. "The department relies so heavily on contractors, even though they're more expensive than career employees, because they're easier to remove and their work is supposedly temporary in nature. Yet the smaller and cheaper civilian workforce is taking the brunt of the hit here."

AFGE is worried that employees may be targeted for elimination without regard to seniority, veterans' preference or other longstanding civil service protections.

"There's no rhyme or reason to how these cuts are taking place. Employees are being notified that their positions have been targeted for elimination but have been provided with little to no information on how these decisions are being made. It's outrageous that we are treating these dedicated civil servants like they're disposable commodities," Gage said. "I don't know how this administration can justify adding to the nation's unemployment rate while pushing more of this work onto a largely non-unionized contract workforce that actually costs taxpayers more than the federal employees they're replacing."

Contracting out any of this work would violate two laws banning the practice of direct conversions, which is when work last performed by federal employees is given to contractors without first determining

whether that would be in the interest of taxpayers. According to a recent study by the Project on Government Oversight, contractors charge the government almost twice as much as the annual compensation of comparable federal employees.

None of the services has fully complied with a Title 10 requirement to inventory their service contracts, making it easier to transfer work now performed by civilians to contractors and avoid detection. AFGE has been working with Sen. Claire McCaskill and Rep. Maurice Hinchey to force DoD to comply with the service contract inventory.

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The American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) is the largest federal employee union, representing 625,000 workers in the federal government and the government of the District of Columbia.