

Some DoD employees may face furlough if budget not passed

BY ALEXANDRA
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ARNEWS

WASHINGTON – The Army may need to furlough civilian employees in mid-August and may later run out of money for active-duty pay should Congress fail to pass a wartime supplemental appropriation, said Under Secretary of the Army Joseph W. Westphal.

The under secretaries of the Navy, Air Force and Defense Department also testified during a House Armed Services Committee hearing July 22 that they are running out of money.

A requested \$33 billion in additional funding – the 2010 Wartime Supplemental Appropriation – has yet to be passed by Congress, leading the Pentagon to develop an “emergency plan” should the funds not be delivered. Last week Defense Secretary Robert Gates said he was disappointed that

the supplement was not passed before Congress’ July recess, leaving the services pleading for passage in the few weeks preceding the August break.

“We will run out of money about the middle of August,” Westphal explained.

Westphal said that funds from the Army’s operations and maintenance accounts were being used to front some deficits, but the cash will soon run dry.

“For the Army, the consequences are pretty significant,” urged Westphal. “It is very important that before you leave for recess, we have the supplemental approved.”

“Failure to pass the supplemental before the recess would essentially hamstring the department’s operations for the remainder of this year and significantly disrupt operations,” agreed

Robert O. Work, under secretary of the Navy.

Work added that without additional funding, the Navy would have to start furloughing civilian employees by mid-August and would run out of money for active-duty sailors in mid-September.

“If the supplement is not passed, we would be in an emergency situation,” he stressed.

The Department of the Air Force echoed the other services’ budgeting concerns, listing similar deadlines for

personnel funding.

Mississippi Congressman Gene Taylor voiced his concern that defense assets are being wasted by leaving valuable military equipment behind as Soldiers pull out of Iraq.

“How many times does the Department of Defense need to keep making the same mistake?” Taylor asked rhetorically referring to American gear left behind in Panama that eventually made its way to Cuba.

Commanders in Iraq have been authorized to donate up to \$30 million in equipment to their Iraqi counterparts, as the government has deemed it too expensive to ship everything back to the U.S.

“I certainly hope this isn’t a case where we’re trying to save a couple of pennies and end up losing American lives ... this is a matter of life and death,” Taylor underscored.

The supplement is entangled with a \$10 billion add-on designated for education jobs – down from the originally-proposed \$23 billion which failed Senate passage in May.

Several House Armed Services Committee members voiced confidence that the appropriation will be passed next week because of the Aug. 9 recess.

Evals open to DA civilians

BY C. TODD LOPEZ
ARNEWS

WASHINGTON – The Army has extended its concern about the mental fitness of Soldiers and their families to the civilians that serve stateside, abroad and in combat zones.

Department of the Army civilians are encouraged now to have their psychological resilience evaluated by the civilian version of the “Global Assessment Tool,” which is part of the Army’s “Comprehensive Soldier Fitness” program.

Three versions of the GAT are available now, through Army Knowledge Online. One version for Soldiers, one for their families, and now one for civilians. All three measure the same things, though with different questions, said Capt. Paul B. Lester, a research psychologist with the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness Office.

“The factors are pretty much the same – we’re looking at

social, emotional, spiritual and family fitness,” Lester said. “A lot of the same things that are important to resilience to Soldiers are absolutely as important to civilians.”

The military version of the online evaluation is mandatory for Soldiers – so far more than 700,000 Soldiers have completed it. Army civilians, however, are not required to take the GAT – though they are encouraged to do so, Lester said.

Civilians can expect to spend about 15 minutes completing the online survey, and afterward they are given feedback about how they did.

“It’s a self-awareness tool to help them get an idea of where they are strong, and also where they can improve,” Lester said. “It gives you an idea of where you are on the resilience continuum.”

After that, he said, GAT participants will have access to “comprehensive resilience modules,” the same ones that Soldiers

are doing, to help them improve their mental toughness.

“The skills we are providing are life skills,” Lester said. “It’s not only how to respond to and be resilient in the face of extreme adversity, as in a combat setting, but how to deal with everyday stressors in family, at work, and in your personal and professional life.”

There are some DA civilians who are deployed now to combat zones like Iraq or Afghanistan, Lester said. And while those civilians are not supposed to actually be participating in combat – that’s the job of Soldiers – life in the combat zone is stressful. So assessing mental fitness and working to improve it is critical for both Soldiers and civilians.

“Psychological resilience in a deployment situation is absolutely critical,” he said. “The work there is hard, the hours long, and the separation from family and friends is challenging.”

Even Army civilians at work stateside or at Army installations overseas can benefit from participating, Lester said.

“We train people, at an individual level, how to be a better team member,” he said. “At the leader level, how being a better team member impacts the overall team. It’s not only individual performance but the additive effect of better individual performance leading to better team performance.”

Lester also said that the results of the GAT are confidential, and that supervisors “will never see” the results of an employee’s participation in the assessment.

Soldiers, Army civilians and family members can all participate in the GAT by visiting the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness website at www.army.mil/CSF/.



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– Joseph W. Westphal



Photo by D. Myles Cullen

In this file photo, a Soldier explains how his group intends to share what they’ve learned with their fellow Soldiers during the first Master Resiliency Trainer course at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, Pa., on Aug. 15, 2009. The class is part of the “Comprehensive Soldier Fitness” program, which aims to provide Army families, civilians and Soldiers better mental fitness resources.

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