

# WORK

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## Civilian Workforce Integral to Military Readiness

by John J. Politi

(NAPSA)—Department of Defense (DoD) civilians—like our men and women in uniform—are an integral part of today's Armed Forces.

Many are in "harm's way," participating directly in operations such as Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and Operations Northern and Southern Watch over Iraq.

Those who are not deployed are performing essential support functions that are the backbone of our modern military.

Thousands are scientists, engineers and technicians, responsible for technological advances in research laboratories. Others provide maintenance and repair at logistic centers and depots throughout the United States.

After many years of service, a large number of experienced civilians are approaching retirement. In the Air Force alone, more than 40 percent of civilians will be eligible to retire in the next five years.

Additionally, more than a decade of defense downsizing has resulted in an imbalanced mix of workforce skills. DoD now has a critical shortage of civilians with valuable technical skills and a shrinking pool from which to select future leaders.

Effective management will be needed for DoD to compete with the private sector for the best and the brightest in the U.S. workforce. "Pay banding" should be mandated across the Department to link pay to performance and offer greater flexibility in recruitment. "Voluntary Separation Incentive Pay" and "Voluntary Early Retirement Authority" should be improved so that we have workforce shaping tools that are attractive to those who have met time-in-service requirements. The maintenance of pay parity between federal civilian employees and the uniformed services is also important to preserve the integrity of the Total Force.

The civilian workforce is a key component of our defense establishment and essential to overall military readiness. The impending wave of civilian retirements must be managed in such a way as to afford the Department of Defense the opportunity to shape, recruit and retain the workforce of the future.

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