

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 15, 2010

The Honorable Robert M. Gates
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Gates:

We support your efforts to reduce the role of contractors in support services and bring appropriate contracted functions back in house. Such initiatives are intended also to comply with President Obama's March 4, 2009, directive to the Director of Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to "identify contracts that are wasteful, inefficient, or not otherwise likely to meet the agency's needs and to formulate appropriate corrective action in a timely manner."

However, in certain cases, we are concerned that the functions are being insourced more because it is expeditious to do so rather than because it was the most appropriate course of action. As we noted in our report accompanying the House Armed Services' version of the FY2010 National Defense authorization Act, insourcing initiatives should give appropriate consideration to impacts on contractor employees.

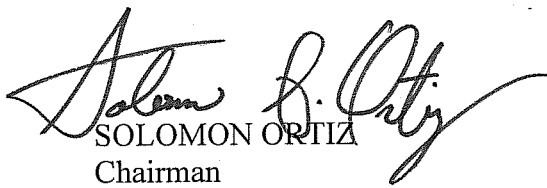
A case in point is the proposed insourcing of fire fighting services at Air Force Plant 42 in Palmdale, California. We are not aware of any evidence that indicates concern regarding execution of the contract for fire services at Plant 42, which has been performed effectively and efficiently by a contractor workforce for 57 years. To the contrary, it appears that these jobs were identified for conversion simply because the existing contract was about to expire.

Of particular concern is the statutory requirement that civil service firefighters cannot be older than 37 at the time of hire and face a mandatory retirement age of 57. Because of the proposed in-sourcing, and this statutory mandate, more than 85% of this highly experienced workforce will be lost in the proposed conversion of Plant 42 fire services. As you are aware, this age limit may be waived.


Because of the concerns raised regarding this particular conversion, we ask that you direct the Air Force to re-evaluate the proposed insourcing at Plant 42. Should the conversion move forward, we strongly urge the Air Force to exercise all the necessary flexibilities provided in statute and regulation, such as waivers to age requirements, to ensure that the contractor workforce is provided every opportunity to transition to government service.

Implementation of insourcing policy should be based on prudent, justified and cost-effective actions, not driven by arbitrary goals and estimated costs savings. As you know, each aspect of the defense workforce – military, civilian, and contract – is critical to mission accomplishment. Striking the right balance is critical to our security and to our economy.

Sincerely,



SOLOMON ORTIZ
Chairman
Subcommittee on Readiness



J. RANDOLPH FORBES
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Readiness