
Defense Report

AUSA



A Hiring Freeze for the Federal Work Force—It May Save Money But It Will Cause Problems, Too.

As part of his campaign to balance the federal budget, President Carter has announced a freeze on hiring for jobs with the government. Over the course of the next year this will mean a reduction of 25,000 in the federal civil service work force. The President's purpose is laudable, but this particular aspect of the budget-balancing process must be looked at very carefully. Its impact on our national defense structure will be more far-reaching than many might suspect.

As long as the freeze is in effect, for example, the Army will only be able to hire one person for each two it loses, no matter what the cause of the losses might be. For every month the freeze is in effect the Army expects to experience a net loss of 900 civilian employees. At first glance this does not seem like very many among a civilian work force of 359,000 but we must remember that cuts in the force over the past few years have already reduced it by more than 50,000.

There is a tendency to forget that the civilians who work for the Army do many more things than handle paperwork. At a typical Army installation they maintain its buildings and training facilities, they provide the communications, store and issue the ammunition, cook the food in the mess halls (they are now called "dining facilities") and both drive and repair the buses and trucks that keep the base moving. They are there because the jobs they perform must be done by someone and there is no way a soldier can be properly trained after a day's work in the post laundry or after driving a shuttle bus. And yet the Army knows that, worldwide, there are now about 15,000 soldiers—almost the strength of a full combat division—diverted from military duties to perform support tasks that should be done by civilians. This use of what is known as "borrowed military manpower" only serves to heighten the problems faced by unit commanders who are required to keep their troops ready for deployment, even though their ranks have already been thinned by military understrengths.

Also, some of the Army's major commands employ a substantial number of civilian engineers and scientists to provide continuity in the development of the most effective weapons and equipment. Because civil service pay scales are substantially below those available to engineers and scientists in the civilian sector, the Army has difficulty in hiring recent graduates. As a result the professional staff is getting older and the Army is being deprived of the newer technical knowledge the younger people could provide. The hiring freeze will aggravate that problem, too. If the freeze stays in effect throughout the balance of Fiscal Year 1980, the Army's civilian pay cost would go down by \$43 million. The penalty the Army will pay in overdue maintenance and in the loss of soldier training time cannot be readily calculated. There is little doubt that the unmeasured cost will exceed the hoped-for savings.