SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
1000 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1000

FEB 20 2013

The Honorable Howard P. "Buck" McKeon
Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

In accordance with statute, I am providing a report on potential civilian furloughs within the Department of Defense. Specifically, title 10, U.S.C., section 1597(e), provides that the Secretary of Defense "may not implement any involuntary reduction or furlough of civilian positions ... until the expiration of the 45-day period beginning on the date on which the Secretary submits to Congress a report setting forth the reasons why such reduction or furloughs are required and a description of any change in workload or positions requirements that will result from such reductions or furloughs." This letter provides the report and information required by this section.

We remain hopeful that the Administration and Congress will reach an agreement to avoid the across-the-board reductions in Federal spending required by the Budget Control Act of 2011, commonly known as "sequestration." The Department must, however, continue to plan for such reductions should Congress not take action prior to sequestration taking effect on March 1, 2013. If sequestration is not avoided, the magnitude of the potential reductions will damage force readiness, slow major acquisition programs, and necessitate civilian furlough actions that will negatively affect our Federal civilian workforce. Overall, sequestration will put us on a path toward a hollow force and inflict serious damage on our national security.

If faced with sequestration, the Defense Department will be forced to forego critical objectives. As we make the difficult decisions about how to maintain our national security to the greatest extent we can in light of these destructive cuts, the Department will have to consider furloughs across the entire defense civilian workforce in order to meet the fiscal target mandated by sequestration. Because there will be no change in the requirements for work to be performed by the Department's workforce to maintain our national security, the workload on each employee and the requirements for each position that will result from such furloughs will be increased beyond what can reasonably be achieved. The furloughs contemplated by this notice will do real harm to our national security. Moreover, we understand that furloughs would have serious adverse effects on the livelihood, morale, and productivity of our workforce, and where possible we will take steps to minimize those effects.

Nevertheless, if required, it is my goal to apply furlough actions in a consistent and equitable manner across the Department, though variations may occur because of the mission and budgetary requirements of each military department and agency. Each military department and agency within the Department will prepare detailed sequestration plans, and the Department will submit an updated plan for operations under a sequestration to Congress, as required by section 116(b) of the Continuing Appropriations Resolution, 2013, Public. Law 112-175.

Finally, if furlough actions prove to be necessary, every affected employee would be subject to furlough for up to 22 discontinuous work days (176 total hours), the maximum number of furlough days allowed without triggering additional notification requirements that follow reduction-in-force procedures (though such an extended furlough action would still constitute a temporary placement on non-pay/non-duty status, rather than a permanent separation from service). We will provide affected employees the requisite advance notice before a furlough occurs. The Department is also engaged in the necessary and appropriate discussions with employee unions, and will discharge any applicable collective bargaining obligations that may arise. In the event an agreement is reached that averts sequestration and restores needed funding, we will immediately cancel any furloughs that have resulted and cease furlough planning.

While furloughs would be disruptive and damaging to our ability to carry out the defense mission, there are no viable alternatives for the Department if sequestration actually occurs. We will continue to work with Congress in an effort to avoid sequestration and furloughs. A similar letter is being sent to the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House, and the other defense oversight committees.

Sincerely,

cc:
The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member