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By Karen Parrish, American Forces Press Service

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WASHINGTON, April 17, 2013 - Pentagon leaders from Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel on down are looking for ways to reduce the pending civilian employee layoffs known as furloughs, Deputy Defense Secretary Ash Carter said yesterday.

Under the department's current plan, more than 700,000 civilian employees will receive furlough notices in early May notifying them of furloughs to begin in June. Furloughs would happen over seven two-week pay periods until the end of September and the close of the fiscal year, with employees likely to be told not to come to work for two days during each of those pay periods.

"I hate the idea of furlough," Carter said during a discussion with service members and civilian employees at Scott Air Force Base, Ill.

"I think it's outrageous. I think it's unfair," Carter said, noting he is planning to cut his own pay, though not his workload, commensurate with any furlough of civilian employees. As a Senate-approved presidential appointee, Carter can't be furloughed.

"I don't want to be collecting my whole paycheck while other people [can't]," the deputy defense secretary added.

The sequester cuts that took effect in March will cost the department \$46 billion through the end of the fiscal year, which ends Sept. 30, officials have said.

Carter noted the continuing resolution Congress passed in March to fund that period gives DOD some flexibility in operations and maintenance spending. The "O and M" account, as it's commonly known, contains funding for civilian pay as well as for training, operations at military installations and family and troop programs. After Congress acted in March, Hagel announced the department would cut the planned number of furlough days from 22 to 14.

Defense leaders are submitting a "massive reprogramming" request to Congress in response to "the idiocy of sequester," Carter said. According to the DOD comptroller's office, reprogramming can

involve moving funds from one appropriation to another or within an appropriation, and cannot be performed without statutory authority. Carter added that he hopes Congress will "give us some additional [budget] relief of some kind" over the summer.

The deputy secretary said department leaders are focused on managing a depleted fiscal year 2013 budget as skillfully as they can.

"Of course, it's not just to alleviate the furlough. ... We have other things that are important -- all these things are important," he said. "We have to make sure our nuclear deterrent forces are at full readiness. We have to support [troops in Afghanistan]. We have to take care of wounded warriors."

Defense leaders are looking to balance spending and "enlarge that pot," Carter said. He added that he hopes the department can further reduce civilian furloughs.

"It's a terrible way to treat people who are dedicated to the nation," he said.

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