

Spring to mark start of personnel system transition

Elaine Wilson, American Forces Press Service

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 18, 2010 – The Defense Department is on track to transition the majority of its more than 220,000 civilian employees out of the National Security Personnel System by Sept. 30, more than a year ahead of deadline, the official heading up that transition said today.

The 2010 National Defense Authorization Act called for the termination of NSPS by January 2012, bringing an end to a controversial personnel system that's been operational for less than four years.

The majority of employees will transition -- starting this spring -- back to the decades-old General Schedule system, but with an assurance in regard to pay.

"I am committed to ensure, as directed in the National Defense Authorization Act, that employees experience no loss of, or decrease in, pay upon conversion," said John James, Jr., director of the Pentagon's NSPS transition office. "The department believes in that and believes it is the right thing to do."

This preservation of pay encompasses all employees. For instance, NSPS employees who are paid a salary that exceeds Step 10 -- the highest step under the GS system -- of their pay grade will retain their pay upon conversion, James explained.

An employee's grade upon conversion will be determined by classification specialists using the same criteria in use for GS employees, James said.

"An employee's position will be evaluated under the General Schedule system and classified," he said. "If that position classifies out as a GS-13, then that employee will become a 13 when they transition."

While the Defense Department has a goal for transition completion, James noted that each organization and component will make a determination on a timeline based on four factors:

- No undue interruption to mission or hardship to employees;
- Established processes to classify NSPS positions into the appropriate non-NSPS system;
- Existence of a legacy performance management system; and
- An information technology system capable of handling the transition.

As officials work to ensure a smooth transition, they also are turning an eye to the road ahead. Along with terminating NSPS, the act gives the Defense Department new authorities to look at developing a successor performance management system that incorporates the best practices of NSPS and GS.

"One of the best advantages under NSPS that we saw was the clear alignment between employees and the organization about what their contribution means to the priorities and the direction of the organization," James said. "As we develop the new authorities and transition employees to the GS system, in most cases, we plan to reinforce that directive and that effort to ensure the employees are aligned with the organization."

Officials also will examine the law's requirements for hiring flexibilities and a personnel performance fund that rewards employees or teams for their performance, he said.

These processes will continue to be open and transparent, James vowed. "I envision the transition and development and use of the new authorities to be a collaborative effort with supervisors, management, leadership, union partners, labor partners, the Office of Personnel Management and other stakeholders. I see this as being an entirely inclusive process."

James emphasized the importance of communication throughout the transition process and future personnel system modifications. "You can't overcommunicate a change," he said.

To that end, the NSPS Web site, <http://www.cpms.osd.mil/nsps/>, now includes transition updates and a training module called GS 101, he said.

"Employees who have never been in the GS system, and there are a few, can go in and walk through that," James said. "It really is informative and tells them how the GS system works." It's also of value to employees who were in the system before, he added.

James encouraged employees to continue to ask questions. "Employees should feel free to ask their chain of command about how that process is being implemented," he said. "GS is very prescriptive in how the process works. They will be informed how their job will be classified and transitioned."