

## **SAMPLE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

Dear Editor,

In your recent article describing the personnel changes at the Department of Defense (DOD), you failed to convey the devastating effect these new regulations will have on the 750,000 civilian DOD employees who work diligently to defend this country. The government will have you believe that the current general schedule system isn't working and somehow needs to be "fixed." Nothing could be further from the truth.

On the surface, the administration says the new system would tie pay to performance and make the DOD more flexible in its hiring practices. What the administration doesn't tell you is that unlike the current system, managers will now have the power to play favorites when it comes to determining which employees deserve an increase in pay. Under the DOD's new personnel regulations managers don't have to provide employees with written performance standards. Additionally, the DOD has not produced any list of offenses that would be cause for termination. Without performance standards and other personnel criteria, employees are left vulnerable to favoritism and politically motivated firings. Additionally, the new system would make it increasingly difficult for workers to challenge unfair disciplinary actions.

Once workers see favoritism and cronyism as the motivations for their pay and raises, morale and worker effectiveness will be destroyed. How is that in the best interest of our country? Under the current system, workers don't have to worry about these unfair practices. The current system isn't broken and as the saying goes, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." DOD employees deserve better.

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Dear Editor,

As a long time federal Department of Defense (DOD) employee and as a veteran, I feel that the changes to the civil service system recently proposed by the DOD basically signal the start of an open attack on the rights of union-represented federal employees. This new system will take away collective bargaining and appeals process rights and will significantly affect my paycheck and my ability to support my family.

The DOD promises to create a new system in which pay is tied to performance. It's not a bad idea if I am truly paid in a fair and equitable manner for my work. Unfortunately, DOD has not ensured that any fair and equitable basis for determining pay-for-performance standards are realistically established in the new system.

Under the current system, average to high-performing employees receive pay adjustments through general pay increases approved by Congress; step increases based on length of service; grade increases based on the type of work performed; and various special incentives such as performance awards, quality step increases, special act recognition and time-off awards. In this same system, poor performers are denied these benefits if their work doesn't meet pre-defined standards.

DOD now wants to redefine how the annual pay increases and longevity step increases are applied to employees and basically allow for a biased application as determined by the DOD on who gets a raise each year. The new system will pit one employee against another, each vying for a little bigger piece of the pay pie. How is this good for employee morale?

Supervisors and Managers in DOD currently have the capability of dealing with poor performers who exhibit bad conduct. They also have options to financially reward exceptional employees. If the current system is working, why does my pay have to be at risk because a few supervisors and managers can't work within the current system? It doesn't make sense and DOD employees deserve better.

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Dear Editor,

At last count, the Department of Defense (DOD) has troops deployed in 120 countries. As a result, our military resources are being stretched dangerously thin because of our engagements in Iraq and other places around the world. As if that weren't bad enough, now the DOD is talking about getting the authority to mobilize civilian employees at will and at a moment's notice.

The plan to mobilize federal workers in the same manner that military personnel are mobilized seems far fetched at first blush but several disturbing actions point to a trend in that direction. First, in 2004 the National Defense Authorization Act included authority for the Secretary of Defense to develop a personnel system that was more able to respond to faster paced wars. The draft plan, released in February 2004, took away nearly every labor protection that had been the law for 50 years. These included seniority, pay raises, and veteran's preference in management driven actions. Subsequently, the draft was withdrawn because DOD didn't follow procedures set by Congress. However, a new draft National Security Personnel System (NSPS) has been released and is in the public comment period.

The second trend is in job vacancy announcements. Virtually every one that I've read in the past year has a mobility clause that requires the applicant to agree to move or go wherever the agency needs them. Many are open ended regarding the time period the employee would be gone and the locations including war theaters.

Third, Charles Abell, a DOD Deputy Secretary, stated in a speech he gave last year to a labor coalition meeting that he wanted to be able to activate civilians at a moment's notice and send them anywhere in the world they were needed.

There are many problems with activating federal workers. The first is that career civil servants did not sign on to be moved around at the will of management, especially when that management would have the authority to move them to unhealthy and dangerous theaters of operation. Had they wanted that, they would have joined the military. Another problem is the cost to taxpayers. Premium pay goes with the move to dangerous areas. Third, how do the managers get the work done when their employees are sent off? Are they to train the federal worker only to lose them to a move to Europe or Iraq? Fourth, just as the National Guards and Reserves cannot get soldiers to re-up, many federal workers will quit rather than mobilize. Does DOD envision a stop-loss for civilian employees? The best and brightest of applicants are not going to sign on to mobilize when they can get better pay and stay stateside in the private sector.

This NSPS is a bad idea. For all the time and resources used on it, it creates more problems than it solves. Because DOD is being stretched thin, it is reaching new levels of desperation in trying to scramble for ill-conceived solutions.

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Dear Editor,

By using various scare tactics in the name of national security, the Departments of Homeland Security (DHS) and Defense (DOD) have been able to bully their way to establishing a radical new personnel system that will not only reduce pay and undermine morale, but also strip away basic worker rights that have been in place for decades. The last time I checked that wasn't the American way.

Having obtained legislation that allows the creation of this new system, the National Security Personnel System (NSPS), DHS and DOD now want to attack federal workers by attacking the unions that represent them. Labor unions are seen as obstacles and to offset these "obstacles" and to once again rely on fear as a tactic, the DOD in particular has released preliminary design options that would destroy the unions' ability to effectively represent DOD employees.

What is happening in America is that those of us who have chosen to devote our working lives to serving America, will now be working in an environment where absolute control over the things we seek to protect for America are not within our grasp for ourselves. Our personal freedoms and ability to question acts of poor management and poor governance will be eliminated. Our ability to be fairly compensated in an

unbiased manner, join or form or be active in a union if we so choose, and have a system where disputes and challenges to improper personnel actions can be challenged and remedied by a impartial third party will not be possible.

With the implementation of the NSPS comes the removal of one of the last protections taxpayers have of ensuring effective and efficient government, the ability of the workers who provide the vital services to protecting America from reporting improprieties. After all, what worker is going to report a wrong doing by the person who sets their pay or has the ability to terminate the employee without any fear of recourse?

It is clear to me that our government has learned vital lessons about terrorism. It is not acceptable when used against you, but remains a valuable tool in managing your workforce.

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Dear Editor,

I am a homeland protector. I have taken an oath to protect and defend the constitution of the United States of America. My allegiance is not for the almighty dollar or a private company— it is to the job I hold and to our way of life. I am a federal employee. The National Security Personnel System (NSPS), also known at HR 1588, is designed to dilute patriotism and loyalty. NSPS takes away the foundation that helped build this great nation. While our military is in Iraq fighting for freedoms, our elected officials have found a way to take away or minimize the blood-fought rights of federal employees. If the federal government will do this to it's own family, what will they do to you?

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Dear Editor,

Currently in Iraq I have friends that are fighting for their lives and for the future of Americans. Daily they are in harms way so that when they come home they can still enjoy the freedoms they seek to give to the Iraqis. But our elected officials have seen fit to spit in the faces of all all Americans with the passage of the National Security Personnel System (NSPS). This system is designed to weaken and dissolve rights of federal employees. Federal employees have taken an oath to defend our nation and it's constitution. With the proposed changes, the loyalty that was once so strong is now diverted to powerful individuals, individuals whose agenda may or may not be in the interest of America. Read NSPS (HR 1588) and then ask for specific answers from your elected officials. If the federal government will do this to their own family, what will they do to you?

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Dear Editor,

Every day for the past \_\_\_\_ years, I got up and did a job that I believed supported our country and its citizens serving in uniform. Recently I have learned that my employer, the Department of Defense (DOD), intends to make several significant changes that directly affect my employment.

Disguised as a new civil service system designed to help DOD combat world terrorism, the changes are nothing more than the misguided mutterings of managers who have never been able to work within a system of rules and regulations.

Under the National Security Personnel System (NSPS), I will be a "deployable asset" and could be sent anywhere in the world at a moment's notice.

My pay will be based on my performance as determined by an unknown group of managers who may or may not personally know or observe the work that I do.

My employer will be able to resize and reshape the workforce without interference by employees, a union representing the workers, members of Congress, or the local communities that support DOD installations where the workers live. In many cases, these shifts will be the result of decisions about where work goes and will be made by DOD officials responding to political posturing and pandering.

Workers in DOD are being misled by DOD officials that at last, their performance will be recognized and that these changes are good for them. The truth of the matter is that these changes will eliminate and remove the last bastions of protections and fairness in the civil service system.

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Dear Editor:

I wanted to write you about an issue that will affect all the DOD employees that subscribe to your newspaper. There is a train running wild down the tracks called by the National Security Personnel System (NSPS). This NSPS will create a whole new personnel and labor relation system for DOD employees. The DOD workers believe that this new NSPS is a train wreck waiting to happen.

Here are just a few of the problems we envision if DOD employees don't have a FAIR grievance system and the opportunity to seek FAIR third party review. These examples also will carry a tremendous cost to the taxpayers in this Country and will lead to erosion of morale in the workplace.

- If DOD Federal Employees don't have a grievance system the employees perceive as fair then all problems will be forwarded to Congress for assistance or resolution. Each Congressman will have to double or triple their staff to take on this influx of congressional reviews. These cases will probably be very volatile since there will be no union role to get to this problem early and help to resolve this issue before it became a BIG problem. A Congressional investigation for every work place grievance will be very costly and will lead to low moral and a potentially dangerous work environment.
- Every base now has an EEO Office that handles discrimination complaints. If each base's EEO system is the only avenue left for DOD employees to try to resolve perceived unfair treatment then everyone will jump into that arena. Every employee will try to fashion their problem around one of the discriminatory factors such as age, race, color, religion, sex, mental or physical disability or any of the other discriminatory factors they think might fit. People can be very creative when they have to be and they will have to be since this might be their only avenue of redress. The EEO system will bog down and cases with real merit could be lost in the avalanche of newly filed cases. This possibility will be very expensive and could damage or break the EEO complaint system for people with real discrimination claims.
- Why are we rushing to do this NOW! We are about to close 100 bases in the upcoming BRAC. Why are we going to spend MILLIONS of DOLLARS training and implementing a NEW NSPS system for a 100 bases that are about to close. Why don't we wait until the BRAC process has run its course and then spend our dollars wisely on bases that will remain open. I am sure DOD could use that money more effectively on the needs of our troops in harms way.

These are just a few examples of the problems that we envision. federal employees in DOD are on the front lines in the defense of this nation. A vast majority of our DOD civilians are veterans who have fought to preserve our rights as Americans to freedom and liberty. Let's not turn our backs on them now when all they seek is a fair and healthy workplace.

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Dear Editor,

Pay for performance within the Department of Defense (DOD)? Our nation's elected leaders are again hooking up to a train that has been running for quite sometime in the public sector with no desire to "check and see if the bridge is out". Again, we are destined to crash as a result of our leader's whims of jumping on a moving train that many companies have chartered and abandoned because it doesn't work.

History has proven that the pay-for-performance leads to a significant destructive effect on self-esteem, motivation and creativity. Employees learn to focus on the parts of their duties that affect a pay raise at the cost of necessary and routine duties that help the work group or company become more efficient. Then, after a period of time goes by in which an employee gets used to a higher amount of pay the bomb drops. Management looks at all this money going out to employees, which is in most cases above budget, and changes the level of this high performance. This forces the employee to attempt to elevate his or her performance to a level that quite often is not possible.

Pay for performance generally leads to supervisors unfairly compensating employees they like better as a person, rather than reward them for their high achievements. This leads to massive effects on self-esteem and motivation and brings out the *"why should I break my back for this company because only their friends are going to be rewarded anyway."*

It's time for the federal government to see the significant problems that highly committed companies such as Hewlett Packard experienced with pay for performance and not push for ineffective, outdated ideas that sweep our fine nation constantly. We would be better off if time was spent refining our existing performance system that many managers neglect to participate in simply because they think it is beneath them.

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Dear Editor,

### **NSPS, just another blow to Non-appropriated Fund Employees.**

Non-appropriated Fund (NAF) white-collar workers have been under a pay banding system for a decade. The pay band system is a farce to employees. The system is designed for employees to be at the mercy of their supervisor to obtain a raise within the salary range for the employee's performance. Most supervisors are not even trained to do proper employee evaluations for performance. The untold fact is that if you kiss the supervisor's hind-end you will be rewarded with the salary increase that the supervisor chooses with in the salary range. If your supervisor doesn't like you, there will be no increase in pay. Fairness, in this system, has been thrown right out the window.

The new personnel system will include those who fill the lowest paid positions in the DOD system. These workers, in contrast to the white-collar employees, are the crafts and trades employees. Their pay increases are currently determined by a local wage survey in which the increase of wages is a percentage across the board to all employees in the same geographic area. The current system has been fair to those employees. Now these employees' wage increases will be determined by the supervisor who has not been trained in evaluations of employees. The current pay band system is just another good old boy system. The new system just reinforces total control.

The NAF pay band system, in its ten years, never has addressed upward mobility. Management determines the labor cost budget and that what it is—period. The employee that wants to put in for a different position within their own grade is stopped because management determines the starting salary will be substantially lower than what any current employee is making. For example an employee wanting to move up is in a current salary range of \$8 to \$15 per hour. The employee is paid \$13 per hour. The worker is on the upper end of the scale because they have been employed for 20 years in NAF. The scenario is that now management controls the position by offering it at \$10 - \$18 per hour and only agreeing to pay \$10 per hour for two years; therefore, the 20 year employee cannot move into the job without losing substantial earnings for several years. Most employees making \$13 cannot afford the decrease.

The truth of the matter is that if the deciding official doesn't want an employee to get a position, they have the means to stop it in this way. They may want someone else to get the position. The other reason is that the deciding official does not want to pay the applying employee more than what the departing

employee is paid. Of course, the reason the departing employee makes less is because that employee has less seniority.

This all equates to eliminating employee seniority. I believe that an employee who has seniority in a system should have options to transfer or change positions. The pay band system currently used is unfair to those employees. Management controls their destiny like a despot in a fascist system. Once again the good old boy system for management to have total control over employees is alive but not well for the worker.

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Dear Editor,

Most of this country's great leaders started at the bottom and moved to the top of their careers. This includes leaders in the private and the public sector. The current NAF pay banding creates an inability for employees to start at the bottom and move up. This is the same system the Department of Defense intends to use when they implement pay-for-performance and cluster position descriptions. However, it will apply to all civilian workers and will take away all rights of the employee to bargain. Federal employees will be at the mercy of their supervisors and this is guaranteed to lead to a spoils system that will make Boss Tweed and the Tammany Hall machine look like amateur night at a local Mason's meeting.

The new system also addresses management's need to move employees to where ever they want them. This ridiculous agenda is costly and shortsighted. NAF employees are among the lowest paid in the work force. It would be unconscionable to uproot them due to poor planning on the part of untrained management. Most employees are well rooted their communities. When accepting the job, most never imagined they'd be called on to make up hotel beds in Iraq. These fine employees are also taxpaying Americans who believe that their rights are being violated as employees. Labor has been an anchor to these employees for decades. Labor and management have bargained together for decades and spent millions of dollars to keep fair and equitable practices in tact. The new system is a labor-busting tactic used for political purposes for the current administration.

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Dear Editor,

The rights and freedoms of American are being slowing and methodically being eroded. Homeland protectors, also know as federal employees, are being placed under a National Security Personnel System (NSPS) that muffles freedom and rights. It appears that America is becoming like the very countries we seek to liberate. Please read the NSPS (also known as HR 1588) and then let your currently free voice be heard.

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Dear Editor,

Federal unions serve an important and valuable service to the American taxpayer and to Congress. They do something taxpayers and our representatives don't have the time to do themselves. They are the watchdogs of the agencies they serve. There is a push in the government to re-write personnel rules to take away the tools unions need to do their jobs. Unions cannot make sure the agencies stay within the confines of protection of employees if their rights to bargain collectively are taken away or curtailed.

In federal agencies it is well known that the problems are at the top not the bottom of their structures. Yet this is where the DHS and DOD are forcing negative changes on workers and limiting open discussions between labor and management. A Government Accountability Office report several years ago stated that the most important challenges that federal agencies needed to address included "a lack of focus on managerial selection and development" and a "lack of trust between employees and top management".

We are not at a time in our history where the labor representatives who bring government problems to the attention of the public that pays for their existence should be gutted. We can't afford it. We can't afford it money-wise. More importantly, we can't afford it security-wise.

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Dear Editor,

Most people would rather visit the dentist than diagram a sentence. Picking out nouns, verbs, and adjectives brings sweat to the brows of most of us. A dangling participle caused many a student to go into self-induced hopeless feelings of inadequacy. Why should you want to be reminded of all that now? At least two departments of the federal government DHS and DOD, and you can throw OPM in that mix as a third helper agency to the other two, are waging a war on federal workers using their skills with nouns and adjectives with great success.

Take for example the words, *national security*. These agencies tell us they need to eliminate labor laws so they can efficiently defend the United States from attack. Do you believe that rank-and-file employees that have basic labor rights were to blame for the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon? In fact, it was lowly FBI agents in places like Minnesota, Florida and New Mexico that repeatedly sounded the alarm prior to the attacks. It was management at the highest levels that didn't listen. How will taking away protections to keep upper management honest regarding employee issues make our nation safer?

This next example is a play on two words—*seniority* and *longevity*. When labor representatives go to the bargaining table and they talk about how long employees have been on the job, they are talking about seniority. Seniority means “status, priority, or precedence achieved by length of service in a given job” which translates to status earned by training, experience, institutional knowledge, and loyalty to the employer. Agency management at DHS and DOD refer to the same concept using the word longevity. Longevity is “the length of time spent in service”—period. They are close to each other in meaning yet still, they don't mean the same thing.

The final example is of great concern in the “war of words.” It's one that portends disaster for all working Americans because it is part of a trend that will not remain only within government service. These two words change worker firings. Apparently, America will be safer if DHS and DOD can limit worker rights in terminations so they only have to explain themselves when there is a *preponderance* of facts instead of how it currently is which is when there are *substantial* facts. Who decides the difference between preponderance and substantial? It ain't *Webster's New World Dictionary*.

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