Official: Roughly 21,000 DOD Civilians Volunteered for Deferred Resignation



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A senior defense official told the media today that approximately 21,000 Defense Department civilian employees volunteered to participate in the Deferred Resignation Program.

The DRP, implemented by the Office of Personnel Management Jan. 28, 2025, offered most full-time federal employees — including most of the nearly 900,000 DOD civilians — the opportunity to resign with full pay and benefits until Sept. 30, 2025.

As part of DOD's effort to align its civilian workforce with national security priorities, the department has been actively processing DRP applications while working to achieve a strategic reduction in manpower of 5-8%, or approximately 50,000-60,000 employees.

"When DRP was offered broadly to the workforce, there was very good participation civilian employees raising their hands and saying they would like to be considered to go on leave and be paid throughout that time," the senior defense official said, adding that DOD has approved a majority of the applications.

The senior defense official said that DOD's human resources team properly vetted each employee and the role that they performed.

"We worked with the services and components to ensure that any of the employees who volunteered to participate … could be approved without negatively impacting the department's lethality and readiness," the official said.

The official also addressed concerns within DOD that a 5-8% reduction in the workforce would push uniformed service members into more civilian-type roles.

"We are confident that we can absorb removals without detriment to our ability to continue the mission, and that's we can be confident that we don't need to worry about any resulting impact on the uniformed force," the official said.

The DPR is one initiative in a three-part strategy the Pentagon is undertaking while realigning its civilian

workforce. The other two measures are a hiring freeze and the removal of certain probationary employees.

Ordered by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth Feb. 28, 2025, DOD's hiring freeze acts as a "passive attrition measure," the official said.

By freezing the approximately 6,000 employees the Defense Department had been hiring monthly in the past, the senior official explained that the total number of DOD civilians would gradually thin over time.

"There's always some friction in any employee pool, it's no different at the ," the official said. "Employees are moving on to other things employees are retiring; and as long as we maintain the hiring freeze, we're gaining thousands towards the workforce reduction target each month just by instituting it," the official added.

The third initiative in workforce realignment is the planned removal of roughly 5,400 probationary workforce employees, which DOD announced Feb. 21, 2025.

Though limited in what could be discussed because of pending litigation, the senior defense official pointed out that choosing the first wave of employees to be released was not done arbitrarily.

"The first removal … directly focused on employees that were documented as significantly underperforming in their job functions and/or had misconduct on their records. So, our guidance was for those to be the first probationary employees removed," the official said, adding that DOD didn't undertake probationary removals "blindly based on the time they had been hired."

When asked whether a reduction in force will be implemented following the hiring freeze, the senior official said the department is currently focused on the three aforementioned

initiatives and that it wouldn’t be appropriate to get ahead of the next steps Hegseth chooses to take.

“It’ll be the secretary’s prerogative to designate how and when he might use any of the other tools that would be available to him to achieve the stated reduction targets,” the official said.