AUSA Civilian Professional Development Seminar
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John Nerger Remarks

"I'd like to share a few thoughts regarding furloughs, workforce reshaping, innovation and workforce development. If some of them come across as provocative, they are intended to be.
It's a lot harder to be a public servant these days….yet I continue to be proud to be a Department of the Army Civilian because the best Army in the world needs the best possible support, and that's what we civilians do. That is what continues to inspire, motivate and reward me."

Furloughs
"That doesn't mean I'm immune to the thoughts of many of you over the FY13 furloughs, exacerbated by actions during the recent government shutdown effectively causing our civilians to be considered and thought of as "non-essential" when nothing further could be from the truth.
An optimist like me doesn't really want to dwell on this, but we just shouldn't brush it aside either….because I'm afraid it did much more damage than give DACs six unpaid days off. And it's not about the money. Most civilians are prepared to sacrifice for Soldiers and their Families, and if it were only the money, most would say "bring it on." I think the damage is much more significant and pervasive than some may think. At a minimum, it deserves to be acknowledged. I'm troubled by how these actions play into the popular mindset that public service isn't valued and that absent government employees are not missed – witness the description by some of the "Government Shutdown" as a…

"Government Slim-Down."
"I'm troubled by the loss of trust in those who've been loyal to this institution who thought their service noble, meaningful and a calling. The other day GEN(R)

Sullivan said AUSA's theme this year was be "Trust – the Bedrock of our Profession." For DACs, that bedrock is now softer than it should be.
I'm concerned DACs will become less motivated, more discouraged and leave us. In fact, that is already occurring. We are seeing engineers & scientists departing from AMC already. Worse….others will be deterred from becoming interested in joining our great team. I'm concerned what DACs think when they don't see or hear their leaders speak out loudly or strongly on their behalf – in DoD, the Executive Branch & Legislative Branch – or when they do, actions aren't matching the words. If people are our credentials, furloughs do not express it.
So we must ask ourselves how we can repair the damage, especially under circumstances likely to persist for some time to come."

Workforce Reductions
"Now DACs face a very real prospect of workforce reductions … on top of continuing hiring freezes, pay freezes, incentive freezes and increases to health care/retirement contributions.
Look….the budget is getting smaller, the active Army is getting smaller and so will the supporting civilian force….it's an unfortunate reality. As we go about it, I'm concerned we don't have the right tools to shape the workforce without letting many go on unpleasant terms."

"VERA/VSIP as a buyout tool is outmoded. It's become somewhat of an "entitlement" for those who've already decided to leave us. We need incentives to entice those not quite ready to leave in order to make room for our younger workers. For example, how about a percentage of one's salary – higher in the 1st Qtr and lower in the 4th Qtr. Or how about adding retirement year credits? We must improve exit options, such as allowing part-time service up to a year with no retirement offset as a means to transition our aging workforce sooner in a way that allows them to leave with dignity and advantages befitting a career of service. We need ways like this to protect our interns and journeymen, instead of

those with longevity like me. As the Army reduces, I don't see an ability to do this….so I'm worried."

Innovation

"Another concern of mine – how do we preserve a culture of innovation at a time we need it most? Uncertain times, furloughs & down-sizing all lead to risk-averse behavior, a preoccupation with a near-term focus, reduced interest in professional development and a weaker environment for innovation.

I'm troubled that when innovation isn't rewarded or incentivized, we get what we pay for, putting us on the road to mediocrity."

Workforce Development

"IMCOM & USACE know what happens when the Army fails to invest in buildings and infrastructure. They fall into costly disrepair and affect the missions they support. Yet a lack of investment in our human infrastructure is much more damaging. What are we doing about it?

Personal and professional growth comes when we stretch our comfort zones. How can we encourage such growth at a time when the tendency will be to hunker down, not seek new assignments, not apply for advanced schooling, not seek broadening assignments, not make time to mentor or be mentored – at a time when many are just focused on surviving.

New civilians – the so-called millenials – are likely to be less inclined to think of the Army in terms of a career, so what will we do differently to challenge them and help them grow and encourage them to stay with us longer than they originally planned. "

Closing

"Every one of us is replaceable but I cannot help but think that being deemed "non-essential" has had a detrimental effect on how DACs view their work, their profession and their role in the Army. You can call a civilian any dirty word, but classifying them as "non-essential" crosses the line.

When we furlough career civilian professionals, we diminish their professionalism.
When we stop incentivizing excellent performance, we start incentivizing mediocrity.
When we freeze compensation and incentive pay, we freeze the desire to do whatever it takes instead of the minimum required.
When we stop honoring public service for the noble profession it truly is, we deter honorable citizens from considering such service … and degrade the morale of those who should be so very proud of that service."

"It's time for us to:
- Speak much more loudly on behalf of DACs and public servants and let everyone know the country is well-served and taxpayers are getting more than their money's worth;

- Work much harder to help all understand just how much the best Army in the world needs the best civilians to support it;

- Recognize the risks these times pose to workplace innovation and workforce professional development & find ways to counter them;

- And we must vow never to make the mistake of furloughing our civilian professionals ever again.

Thank You."