

## PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

FORT POLK, La. -- Department of Defense employees at Fort Polk will soon move to four-day work weeks, taking either Mondays or Fridays as their designated furlough day. Some directorates may use another day of the week depending on mission requirements. This is an unpaid day, occurring weekly, and equates to about a 20 percent reduction in pay.

In two informational briefings held May 28 at the Bayou Theater, Brig. Gen. William Hickman, commanding general, Joint Readiness Training Center and Fort Polk, Garrison Commander Col. Roger Shuck and Ray Wardle of the Civilian Personnel Advisory Center addressed the DoD civilian workforce concerning the upcoming furlough period, which begins July 8 and ends Sept. 30.

In March, defense officials told civilian employees to expect as many as 22 furlough days during the current fiscal year, part of department-wide efforts to slash spending in response to across-the-board budget cuts known as sequestration. In the time since, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel has been working to avoid or reduce the temporary layoffs, saying he had sought advice from department leaders and agencies, both civilian and military, but found no other way to help in closing the budget gap.

In a memo to senior department leaders, Hagel said he had "very reluctantly" concluded that major budgetary shortfalls triggered by a \$37 billion cut in defense spending for fiscal year 2013 forced a decision he said he deeply regrets, and one that he acknowledged will disrupt lives and impact DoD operations.

However, he credited Congressional passage of a defense appropriation bill in March in part for helping to reduce the number of days civilians would be temporarily laid off by half.

At Fort Polk, every effort will be made to mitigate the effects of furlough on civilian employees, said Hickman.

"Last week, we got the official word that the furlough process is going forward," said Hickman. "I know this a huge deal for you personally, and for your Families, and it is also a huge deal for the mission of Fort Polk and the Army."

Shuck said the furlough affects all Army appropriated fund employees with the exception of those working at child development centers and the sexual assault response and victim advocate programs.

"This is not pleasant, and we certainly wish and hope that this will not go any further than Sept. 30," he said.

Shuck then explained the time line for actions, as follows:

- Through June 5: Furlough proposal notices issued to employees.
- June 4-12: Employee reply period, ending seven days from date notice was received.
- June 5-July 5: Furlough decision letters issued to employees (these will state which day of the week is your designated furlough day)
- July 8: Furlough period begins with anticipated end date of Sept. 30.

“We are prohibited from using compensatory time or overtime to offset the furlough,” said Shuck. “Furloughed employees are also prohibited from working from home or onsite during furlough days. That means you can’t volunteer to work just because you’re mission focused, and some of you really are and we appreciate that, but we can’t allow that.” Shuck also said that if Congress finds a way to end the furlough before Sept. 30, the information will be disseminated as quickly as possible.

Wardle addressed issues such as handling holiday leave days and the fact that furlough days may not be taken consecutively. He also said the 88-hour furlough (eight hours a day for 11 non-consecutive days) will not affect retirement.

A link containing furlough information can be found at the JRTC and Fort Polk web site at [www.jrtc-polk.army.mil](http://www.jrtc-polk.army.mil). Look on the left for the link “Furlough information.” The web also contains a link to resources that may be of use. The site will be populated with more information as it is available. Information will also be posted on the Guardian facebook site.