

Moments of Transition

Written by Nick Sanders
Monday, 06 February 2012 00:00

In late January, 2012, our “friends” at the [Project on Government Oversight](#) (POGO) noted that General James Cartwright (USMC, Retired), former Vice Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had [joined](#)

[the Board of Directors](#)

of Raytheon Company. Despite POGO’s somewhat mean-spirited insinuations to the contrary, the transition from military service to defense contractor is not at all unusual. There is no reason at all to believe that General Cartwright will do anything but add value as a senior advisor and leader of the Top 5 defense company.

POGO also reported that former Under Secretary of Defense Bill Lynn [had accepted](#) the position of CEO at DRS Technologies, a subsidiary of Finmeccanica.

We also want to report that Michael Thibault, former executive at DCAA and former co-chair of the Commission on Wartime Contracting, has found a new position after the sun-setting of the CWC—as Vice President of Government Finance and Compliance at DynCorp International. According to [this report](#) at FederalTimes.com, Thibault was expected to help DynCorp fight fraud, waste and abuse. Readers may remember that the CWC raked DynCorp, and other “contingency contractors” supporting operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, over the proverbial coals during several years of hearings.

The same FederalTimes.com report noted that former Department of Defense Inspector General, Gordon Heddell, had found a position with Booz Allen Hamilton, as a “senior executive advisor.”

Though POGO had some nasty comments regarding Lynn and Cartwright, they were noticeably kinder to Thibault and Heddell. [In this blog post](#), POGO wrote—

Unlike some revolving door situations, the hiring of Michael Thibault and Gordon Heddell seems based more on higher principle than on purely political or economic gain. We can only hope that the skills they developed as watchdogs and fighters of fraud, waste, and abuse will continue to serve the public interest.

We think POGO treated the transitions of the “former watchdogs” differently than it treated the transitions of the former DOD leaders. At best, POGO displayed an interesting level of naiveté if it attributed the hiring of Thibault and Heddell to a “higher principle than ... purely political or

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economic gain.” We see the transitions of Lynn, Cartwright, Thibault, and Heddell as essentially being equivalent in both form and substance.

One transition that is a bit different from those we’ve discussed heretofore—and also a bit sadder—is the [rather abrupt retirement](#) of (Admiral) Jim Maslowski (US Navy, Retired) from his position as President of Hawker Beechcraft Defense Company (HBDC). Readers may remember [our article](#) on the travails of HBDC as it pursued award of the Light Air Support (LAS) contract, and its subsequent bid protests. In our article we focused on questions regarding the HBDC Contracts Manager, who apparently left a critical piece of correspondence in his in-box for two weeks before reading and acting on it. We wrote—

Was the HBDC contracts manager sick or on vacation? Was he or she busy with other pressing matters? The GAO didn’t say and we may never know. But still, it says something (to us, anyway) that correspondence from a customer regarding a competition for what was potentially more than a billion dollars’ worth of business just sat in an in-box for two weeks. ... HBDC ... has to explain (to its Board of Directors and shareholders, if to nobody else) why a critically important piece of correspondence lay unopened for two weeks, letting regulatory deadlines lapse in the meantime. (We would not want to be in that contracts manager’s seat right now....)

Not to mention, of course, why its proposal for such a ‘must-win’ competition was so flawed that the Air Force threw it out as being (essentially) uncorrectable. Did HBDC have the right skill sets? Did they put the company’s varsity team on the proposal? What went wrong?

We focused on the poor HBDC Contracts Manager, but apparently we should have aimed higher. The HBDC Board of Directors apparently held Admiral Maslowski responsible for the fiasco we described in our article. His departure was abrupt and unplanned-for, as the company has appointed an interim President while they search for a suitable successor. In the meantime, though, Admiral Maslowski isn’t disappearing entirely. The company’s press release stated, “Upon retirement, Maslowski will continue as a consultant to HBDC and its business development efforts with the title of Vice Chairman, HBDC.”

We have no doubt Admiral Maslowski will continue to be paid as a consultant. We assume that was a part of his negotiated exit deal. As to whether he will actually perform any “business development” efforts in return for those transitional consulting fees ... well, let’s just say that experience has made us a bit cynical in that area.

J. Michael Straczynski has written—

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The future is all around us, waiting, in moments of transition, to be born in moments of revelation. No one knows the shape of that future or where it will take us. We know only that it is always born in pain.

As we look at these five men moving through their moments of transition, we wonder what the shape and direction of their future will be.