

By: Francis Rose and Andrew Wagner | April 30, 2019

How to make DoD's acquisition system “mission first”

David Drabkin and Michelle Johnson from the Section 809 panel discuss how to overhaul the acquisition system at the Pentagon, and encourage the Defense Department to buy more from the commercial market.

Delivering innovative technology to the nation's war fighters is vital to the Department of Defense's mission. However, the Section 809 Panel says that the acquisition system needs its own innovation to stay modern. **Michelle Johnson**, senior research analyst at the Section 809 Panel, says that while Congress has wanted the Pentagon to buy more from the private sector, but it's very difficult in practice. "There's a lot of capabilities and products and services out in the dynamic marketplace that we just can't access. For the past 40 years or longer, Congress has directed DoD to use more commercial buying, to get the things readily available in the marketplace that you and I can buy today. What we've found is that since the '90s, instead of doing more acquisitions using commercial procedures, we have actually done less, and we have made those procedures more complicated," Johnson said. **David Drabkin**, chair at the Section 809 Panel, says that while competitors to the U.S. can get what they need faster, the American system can be improved to deliver that speed, without taking over the industrial base. "We've outlined processes that, if adopted, will give us the benefit of the speed we need while being mindful of the things that guide us every day. We are not going to commandeer industries," Drabkin told Government Matters. "But, what we are proposing by putting us on a war footing is appreciating the need for speed while being mindful of those things we live by. Competition, transparency, integrity in the process. We don't steal, we buy stuff, but we can certainly do it faster."