The story (which may be apocryphal) goes like this:

Alanis Morissette's 1995 album, "Jagged Little Pill," was a huge hit (selling more than 33 million copies); it won five Grammy awards (including album of the year). The album spawned six singles, including "You Oughta Know," "All I Really Want," and "Ironic". The lyrics of "Ironic" are famous for generating a two-decade long debate about whether, in fact, the situations described in the song were ironic. The consensus is that they were not. They were not ironic. Isn't that ironic?

UK Interviewer: Ms. Morissette, let's talk about your song, "Ironic." The lyrics are puzzling. "A black fly in your chardonnay?" "rain on your wedding day?" "good advice that you just didn't take?" Et cetera. None of those are ironic. Most are just coincidence.

Morissette: Okay.

UK Interviewer: Isn't this misuse of the word 'irony' just another example of the failed American educational system?

Morissette: Actually, I was born and raised in Canada. I'm not American by birth or education.

UK Interviewer: Uh ….

Morissette: Isn't *that* ironic?

Whether you call it irony or coincidence, we couldn't help but notice that the very day after we submitted our most recent **blog post** —the one that included criticism of the Pentagon regarding its failed efforts to reform its own backoffice bureaucracy (the so-called "Fourth Estate")—a **new report** was released from the

Pentagon's Office of the Chief Management Officer (OCMO) that addressed progress to reduce costs in that very area.

Why the report? Well, Section 921 of the 2019 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) requires it. Specifically, it requires the OCMO to reduce costs in certain "covered areas" by 25 percent by GFY 2020, or to justify why doing so would create unacceptable inefficiencies. And that same Section of the public law requires the OCMO to issue a periodic report on progress being made. So here it is…

Let's cut to the bottom-line. Quoting from the report:

In order to meet Congressional intent, this report focuses on reforms and financial savings in the four covered activities within the Fourth Estate, including Defense Agencies and DoD Field Activities (DAFA). While the OCMO projects that it will not meet the 25 percent savings targets in all of the four covered activities in FY 2020 against the FY 2019 baseline, the OCMO forecasts an average 5 percent cost reduction for each of the covered activities in the Fourth Estate.

So: Mission *not* accomplished.

One thing that we noticed—which should be no surprise to those who follow Pentagon business reform efforts—is that a new group was created to oversee the reductions to bureaucracy. The new group is called "Fourth Estate Management Office" (FEMO). As noted in the report, FEMO is supported by outside consultants.

That's right. The first action taken in the effort to reduce bureaucracy was to create a new bureaucratic entity.

We further noticed that the ability to reduce Fourth Estate costs was tied to the definition of which entities comprise the Fourth Estate. Thus, adding the Washington Headquarters Services to the definition of the Fourth Estate—and then declaring a goal to reduce WHS costs by 30 percent—means that the other functional aspects of the Fourth Estate don't need to be cut as

much.

That strategy is consistent with a bureaucracy protecting itself.

Is this a big deal? Not really. It's just interesting to observe how the Pentagon protects itself. Former SECDEF Gates called for cuts in this area. Congress called for cuts in this area via public law. You'd think there would be some accountability for failing to deliver. Not so far.

The Pentagon bureaucracy seems to be avoiding the hard decisions in an apparent effort to protect certain fiefdoms, despite being told to make those hard decisions by people who would seem to have authority in the chain of command.

Isn't *that* ironic?