

Washington, DC - Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today released the following statement regarding the Pentagon's decision to issue a stop-work order for the construction of a new fleet of presidential helicopters. The congressman, who is a member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense, has been leading the fight in Congress to protect the presidential helicopter program from being cut.

"While I'm very disappointed that the Pentagon chose to issue a stop-work order for the presidential helicopter program, this action is not entirely unexpected. It is, however, an irrational and fiscally irresponsible step. It makes no sense for the Pentagon to cancel the presidential helicopter program and in the same breath acknowledge the need for the very project it just canceled. The stop-work order calls for a new presidential helicopter construction plan to be developed within 30 days, which is unrealistic. There is no way a new plan can be developed in 30 days that can possibly compete with the current, mature project that's been underway for four years.

"The Pentagon and the White House are claiming that canceling the current presidential helicopter program is the fiscally responsible thing to do when it's anything but that. Canceling the presidential helicopter program would waste the nearly \$4 billion already committed to the current program and require the Navy to start the bidding process all over again. The final outcome would be far costlier than finishing the job that's already well underway and has produced five helicopters that are undergoing test flights. The fiscally responsible thing to do here is to continue the current construction of the presidential helicopter fleet. With a current fleet of helicopters that was designed more than a half century ago and constructed in the 1970's, there is a dramatic need to develop a new generation of technologically sophisticated helicopters.

"I, along with others in Congress, am wholeheartedly committed to continuing funding for the presidential helicopter fleet that Lockheed Martin-Owego is currently constructing. As I've been saying for some time now, we can acquire a full fleet of Increment 1 helicopters -- the less-costly version the new helicopters -- on time and within the original budget constraints. Doing so is the most prudent course of action that will protect this and future presidents and not waste taxpayer money. Today's stop-work order does not change my focus and determination to fight in Congress to fund this much-needed helicopter project. Our effort to save the presidential helicopter program will aggressively continue."