

Binghamton, NY - Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today laid out his aggressive multi-pronged approach to save the VH-71 presidential helicopter program that is being led by Lockheed Martin-Owego. The congressman detailed the merits of the helicopter program and discussed how he plans to use his seat on the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense to continue funding the initiative through the upcoming appropriations process. Hinchey also discussed his ongoing efforts to have senior Pentagon and White House officials present new information about the project to the president in order to help convince him to reverse the proposed cut to the project.

"We are moving very aggressively in Congress to continue funding the presidential helicopter initiative and I feel very good about the chances of this program carrying on in the years ahead," Hinchey said. "The hard-working employees of Lockheed Martin in Owego have poured their heart and soul into this project and we will not let political talking points from Senator McCain and others unfairly influence the decision-making of this process. This and future presidents need a safe reliable helicopter with modern communications equipment and that's exactly what Lockheed Martin's VH-71 helicopter fleet would provide. Additionally, it would be a waste of nearly \$4 billion in taxpayer money if this program were scrapped and started over from scratch. We cannot allow taxpayer money to be wasted in such a manner when an affordable alternative is available."

Hinchey noted that the president's budget proposal, which was submitted to Congress last week, is just that; a proposal. Congress will subsequently act on that proposal, accepting many of the president's recommendations and rejecting others. The congressman said Congress has the constitutional authority to determine how federal funds are allocated and that he expects that authority will be used to continue funding the presidential helicopter program.

The next step in the legislative process is expected to occur next month when the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense begins to take up debate on how to shape the defense budget for Fiscal Year 2010. As a member of that subcommittee, Hinchey intends to introduce a provision in that bill that would continue the development of the presidential helicopter program. In particular, the congressman will seek to implement an idea that he and Congressman Michael Arcuri (D-NY) proposed to President Obama earlier this year. That proposal would involve expanding Increment 1 of the helicopter project, which has already produced nine helicopters that are currently undergoing test flights, in lieu of moving onto Increment 2 -- the more costly and technically sophisticated phase of the project. By expanding the number of Increment 1 helicopters, it's estimated that the Navy could purchase a full fleet of 23 Increment 1 helicopters on-time and within the original budget plan.

Hinchey has been in regular contact with the chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense about the presidential helicopter program. The two agree that an expanded Increment 1 plan would be a much more effective use of taxpayer money than starting the entire bidding process all over again.

"I fully intend to use every bit of my authority as a member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense to fund this helicopter program in order to ensure a new presidential fleet is delivered in full," Hinchey said. "It would be a serious mistake and inconsistent with broader national economic objectives to potentially cut 800 jobs related to the presidential helicopter project at a time when the White House and Congress are committed to creating jobs through economic recovery investments. The numbers simply don't add up for such a drastic step to be made. I will not rest until all of the facts are clearly understood by everyone involved. I'm convinced that when members of Congress and even the president look at all of the information about this project that the initiative will receive the funding it needs to move forward."

In an effort to ensure that none of the 800 presidential helicopter-related jobs at Lockheed Martin-Owego are prematurely cut, Hinchey sent a letter last week to Dr. Ashton B. Carter, Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology & Logistics, urging him to not issue a stop-work order on the program. If a stop-work order went through, jobs would most likely be cut even though Hinchey and others are working to continue funding the project. In his letter to Carter, Hinchey said the Pentagon should recognize Congress' intent to continue funding the presidential helicopter program and therefore not issue a stop-work order, which would increase costs and delay the delivery of the helicopters.

Hinchey has spent the past several weeks meeting and speaking with senior Navy and White House officials to alert them to the need of the presidential helicopter. The congressman has talked with them about how the current fleet of helicopters has technology that is more than a half century old and was built in the 1970's. He also noted that at least \$3.2 billion has already been spent on the helicopters and an estimated additional \$400-\$600 million would be spent to cancel the contract. Hinchey has also pointed out that nine helicopters have already been built and are currently undergoing test flights. Were funding for the program to be cut, as the president has proposed, none of the helicopters that have already been constructed could be used, which would be a significant waste of taxpayer money.

During the course of his meetings with senior Navy and White House officials, Hinchey learned

that Defense Secretary Gates did not have new information showing that Increment 1 helicopters have increased structural integrity and longer expected lifetimes than was initially indicated when he recommended last month to President Obama that the program be canceled. The congressman is continuing to work to ensure that President Obama and Secretary Gates have that updated information and fully consider it as the process moves forward now that the initial step of submitting the president's budget to Congress has been taken.

Further, the current fleet of helicopters has only 10 seats. With a first family of five that includes the president's mother-in-law, and a crew of five that includes Secret Service agents, there is no room for senior staff to travel with the president, which is critical in coordinating information and instructions during national emergencies. Lockheed Martin's Increment 1 version of the new helicopter can seat 14 passengers, which would enable four staff members to travel with the president and his family. Meanwhile, the current aging fleet is being stripped down to reduce weight due to safety concerns.