

## *Congressman Plans to Use His Seat on House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense to Complete Project that Will Provide Modern, Safe Helicopters for Current & Future Presidents*

*Washington, DC* - With the White House formally proposing to cut the construction of a presidential helicopter fleet from next year's federal budget, Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today urged the Defense Department to hold off on issuing a stop-work order on the project while he and others in Congress work aggressively to continue funding the much-needed project.

In a letter sent today to Dr. Ashton B. Carter, Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology & Logistics, Hinchey laid out the many reasons why he believes the continuation of the presidential helicopter program is necessary and said it was important for the Pentagon to not issue a stop-work order, which would prematurely cut the jobs of those working on the construction of the presidential helicopter fleet. Hinchey noted that the president's budget proposal is just a first step in a long process and that no drastic decisions should be made at this point. The congressman said he intends to aggressively use his position on the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense to fund the program, which is being run by Lockheed Martin in Owego, New York and has cost at least \$3.2 billion since it began in 2005.

"While it is very disappointing that the president's budget proposal cut funding for the new presidential helicopter program, this decision was not unexpected and does not change our intention to fund the initiative through the regular, annual appropriations process in Congress," Hinchey said. "It makes no sense to start this program from scratch, as the White House is suggesting, when five helicopters have already been completed and are undergoing testing and approximately 18 more can be constructed within the original budget plan and timeline. To walk away from this program now would be to completely waste several billion dollars already spent on the program and cause the president to continue flying around in a outdated helicopter that was designed in the 1950's and constructed in the 1970's."

The congressman 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. During the course of those meetings, Hinchey learned that the Navy now has new information showing that the new fleet of presidential helicopters currently being constructed by Lockheed Martin in Owego, New York has a much longer lifespan and greater structural integrity than previously expected. It's believed that Defense Secretary Gates did not have that updated information when he recommended to President Obama last month that the presidential helicopter program

be canceled. The congressman is working to try 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.

On March 16, Hinchey and Congressman Michael Arcuri (D-NY) led 11 other House members in proposing an alternative way forward to the president that 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 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 had several conversations with the chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense and the two intend to use the Fiscal Year 2010 Defense Appropriations bill to fund an expansion of Increment 1 so that this and future presidents have a fleet of safe, modernized helicopters. 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.

With those in Congress who fund defense projects clearly intent on funding the presidential helicopter program, Hinchey urged Under Secretary Carter to not issue a stop-work order for the Increment 1 part of the initiative, noting, "As I understand it, you may be asked to sign an Acquisition Decision Memorandum (ADM) to terminate the program in the face of the current budget proposal. I strongly urge you not to do this and to consider the significant capability of Increment 1, the significant taxpayer investment in that capability, and the dire need to provide safe and reliable transportation to the Office of the President of the United States. In addition, I request that you take into account the intent of Congress in realizing the investment in this program and the significant cost increase and delay a stop-work order would incur."

The helicopter that the president primarily uses was constructed in 1976. The effort to replace the current fleet of presidential helicopters began following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks when it became clear that an aircraft was needed to more adequately protect the president and enable him to communicate during a crisis with top officials on the ground.

Hinchey has been involved for many years with Lockheed Martin's effort to construct the new presidential helicopter fleet. The congressman helped advocate for the company to win the contract in 2005 because of its outstanding ability to construct a top of the line helicopter fleet. He also fought last year to ensure \$100 million was included in the defense budget to ensure the program received the funding it needed to continue moving forward.

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The full text of Hinchey's letter to Under Secretary Carter follows:

May 7, 2009

Dr. Ashton B. Carter  
Under Secretary of Defense for  
Acquisition, Technology & Logistics  
3010 Defense Pentagon, Room 3E1010  
Washington DC, 20301-3010

Dear Under Secretary Carter:

Congratulations on your confirmation to your new post as Under Secretary of Defense. You join the administration during a critical time in our nation's history and as a member of the House Appropriations Defense subcommittee, I look forward to working with you in our mutual effort to ensure the Department of Defense is as strong and effective as possible.

I am writing to you today regarding an important Navy program that directly impacts the safety of the current and future presidents and their ability to effectively lead during times of crisis. The VH-71 program, which is developing a new fleet of presidential helicopters, is currently slated for termination in the president's fiscal year 2010 budget proposal that has been transmitted to Congress.

Unfortunately, I am concerned that the proposal to end this program does not take into account a number of important factors. The Navy has already invested at least \$3.2 billion into this program and as a result there are nine capable Increment I aircraft that have already undergone hundreds of hours of successful test flights. On March 19, 2009, I wrote to President Obama urging him to consider expanding the Increment 1 fleet to make it the full fleet solution based on the aircraft's significant performance and budget growth of the program of record.

Today, I urge you to consider that way forward and the possibility of using Increment 1 to replace the VH-3D helicopters, which are in dire need of replacement. The fact of the matter is that we have a real and urgent need to replace presidential helicopters and a capable solution ready to do so. To end the program now would waste a very good compromise solution that is nearing completion at the cost of at least \$3.2 billion, in addition to \$400-600 million in termination fees. The Office of the President and the taxpayer cannot afford to start over at square one.

Recently, senior Navy officials have confirmed that they have received new information that was not available in the lead up to Secretary Gates' decision with regard to structural failsafety and fatigue life. Those officials could not confirm if Secretary Gates was aware of the updated situation. I urge you to consider this information and to speak directly with the men and women who operate the current presidential fleet, as well as those who have developed Increment 1.

As I understand it, you may be asked to sign an Acquisition Decision Memorandum (ADM) to terminate the program in the face of the current budget proposal. I strongly urge you not to do this and to consider the significant capability of Increment 1, the significant taxpayer investment in that capability, and the dire need to provide safe and reliable transportation to the Office of the President of the United States. In addition, I request that you take into account the intent of Congress in realizing the investment in this program and the significant cost increase and delay a stop-work order would incur.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please do not hesitate to call upon me for further information. I look forward to hearing from you on this important matter.

Best regards.

Sincerely,

Maurice D. Hinchey