

*Owego, NY* - Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today released the following statement regarding Defense Secretary Robert Gates' recommendation to President Obama that the VH-71 presidential helicopter program be canceled.

"I am extremely troubled by Secretary Gates' recommendation to President Obama that the VH-71 presidential helicopter program be canceled. I firmly believe Secretary Gates' recommendation is misguided and ignores the fact that the safety and security of the president requires the replacement of the current fleet of presidential helicopters, which were designed in the 1950's and built in the 1970's. While attempting to save taxpayer money, the recommendation also ignores the fact that \$3 billion has already been spent on the project. Further, at a time when the government is working aggressively to create jobs, the cancellation of this project would jeopardize hundreds of jobs in upstate New York and thousands across the country.

"To turn away from the VH-71 presidential helicopter now would be to put this and future presidents at risk for no legitimate reason. In this day and age, the president needs a reliable, safe helicopter with a wide array of communication equipment on board in order to communicate with key officials on the ground. The current fleet is more than three decades old and needs to be replaced. I've met the Navy personnel responsible for executing this program and I've received the classified briefings about how a new helicopter fleet is so critical to the safety of the president. Those experiences and the information provided to me through them only further reinforce the progress that has been made and the importance of the continuation of the current program.

"If Secretary Gates' recommendation is accepted, more than \$3 billion in taxpayer money -- nearly half of the original contract -- would be wasted. That money has already been spent on the development of the new fleet of helicopters and essentially would be wasted for no reason if the VH-71 program does not continue. Congressman Arcuri and I, as well as others in Congress, recently proposed an alternative solution that would have expanded the first increment of helicopter in lieu of moving onto Increment 2 -- the more costly phase of the project. Doing so would enable the Navy to purchase a full fleet of 23 Increment 1 helicopters on-time and within the original budget plan.

"The people of the Southern Tier are invested in the completion of this helicopter program at Lockheed Martin in Owego. We cannot simply cede to political talking points from Senator McCain and others and walk away from a program that is so critical to the safety of the

president and that also has a significant economic impact.

"It's important to note that Secretary Gates' recommendation today is just that -- a recommendation. It is the beginning of a long process. As a member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense, which funds defense projects such as the VH-71 presidential helicopter, I will work very aggressively to continue funding this program. This project is worthy of being completed and we will not let it be discarded for political reasons."