

Language Supports Expanding Increment 1 Aircraft to Replace Current, Aging Fleet

Washington, DC - Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today hailed the House Armed Services Committee's approval this week of a measure that strongly encourages the Pentagon to continue procuring Lockheed Martin's Increment 1 presidential helicopter and to use it as the primary helicopter for the president. While the survival of the presidential helicopter project still faces many hurdles in the weeks and months ahead, Hinchey said the support of the current Lockheed Martin program by the House Armed Services Committee is a strong indication that legislators on Capitol Hill are not prepared to buy into the mistaken plan to terminate the project.

"There remains a lot of hard work to be done to save Lockheed Martin's presidential helicopter program, but we are finally starting to see some real momentum from Congress against the Pentagon's plan to terminate the program," Hinchey said. "By endorsing Increment 1, the House Armed Services Committee sent a strong message to the rest of Congress and the Pentagon that wasting the incredible investment in the VH-71 program is unacceptable. Instead, we should continue developing a new fleet of Increment 1 helicopters for the president that will replace the current outdated fleet, which is constantly going in for repairs because it simply is too old to continue flying."

Prior to the committee's vote on the legislation, Hinchey personally urged the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee and the chairman of the subcommittee that has jurisdiction over the development of the presidential helicopter to support the continuation of Lockheed Martin's Increment 1. As part of the report that accompanies the Defense Authorization bill for fiscal year 2010, the House Armed Services Committee expressed its disappointment with the way in which the presidential helicopter was been handled by the previous administration and said that in order to save taxpayer money the current Lockheed Martin program for Increment 1 should be continued "for use as the normal transport for the President..." The committee also noted that it agrees with Secretary Gates' suggestion that the Pentagon should examine the development of a secondary aircraft that would be used in emergency situations. Hinchey said a secondary aircraft could potentially come in the form of Lockheed Martin's Increment 2 helicopter, which is a more sophisticated and further technologically advanced version of the Increment 1 helicopter.

The measure passed by the House Armed Services Committee now moves to the House floor for a vote. In addition to helping secure passage of that bill in the House, Hinchey is continuing to work very aggressively to have the House pass a defense funding bill for fiscal year 2010 that

includes the necessary money to carry out the Armed Services Committee's recommendation that Lockheed Martin's Increment 1 be continued and used as the primary presidential helicopter. Hinchey, who is a member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense, said he intends to use his position on that panel to attempt to have funding inserted for the helicopter.

In explaining its reason for supporting Lockheed Martin's Increment 1 presidential helicopter, the House Armed Services Committee echoed many of the concerns Hinchey has expressed as to why it would be a huge waste of taxpayer money to cancel the program now. At least \$3.2 billion has already been spent on the current presidential helicopter program. If the program is canceled, early termination fees would bring the total cost to approximately \$4 billion and result in no helicopters being added to the presidential fleet. Hinchey has argued that an entire new fleet of modern, Increment 1 presidential helicopters can be completed within the original budget constraints of the project.

The committee also agreed with Hinchey's argument that the Pentagon's plan to rebid the entire project would be far more costly than it would be to simply continue the current program, which has already produced nine helicopters that are undergoing test flights. Internal Navy estimates indicate that a rebid helicopter project would cost between \$10 and \$17 billion. When the \$4 billion already spent on the program is factored in, the overall cost rises to between \$14 and \$21 billion, which is far more costly than it would be to continue the production of Lockheed Martin's Increment 1.

"I fully intend to fight for the insertion of money in the upcoming defense spending bill that will restore funds for the presidential helicopter program currently being carried out by Lockheed Martin in Owego, New York," Hinchey said. "I am under no illusion that this will be an easy task, but I am extremely pleased by the Armed Services Committee's support for continuing Increment 1. I will continue to make the case to my colleagues in the House and Senate as well as to administration officials, as to why continuing the current program will protect the president, save taxpayer money, and protect the economy. This fight remains far from over."

The current presidential helicopter fleet was designed more than a half century ago, constructed in the 1970's, lacks secure communication lines, is defective in other ways, and is forced to undergo costly and constant maintenance and repairs.

