

Project On Government Oversight

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September 29, 2009

Chairman Daniel K. Inouye and Ranking Member Thad Cochran
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Room S 128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Via Facsimile

Dear Chairman Inouye and Ranking Member Cochran:

We would like to thank the committees for placing national security objectives over parochial interests by deciding to stop buying F-22s. Additionally, we would like to thank the Senate Appropriations Committee for refusing to provide additional funding for the VH-71 Presidential Helicopter program or the continued development of the Joint Strike Fighter Alternate Engine, two programs that the Department of Defense has stated repeatedly that they neither want nor need to continue.

We are disappointed, however, by the decision to earmark funds—\$2.5 billion in the case of the Senate appropriators bill—for C-17 aircraft in excess of the amounts requested by the President. The Pentagon has tried to kill this plane for a decade, but this has been the earmark that will not die. Prior to this year, a total of 205 C-17s have been ordered. The 2005 Mobility Capability Study—the most recent completed analysis for air transport needs—stated that 180 C-17s are all that are necessary within an acceptable measure of risk. Defense Secretary Robert Gates and the Air Force agree that we have sufficient airlift capacity with our current fleet.

But when it comes to the C-17 program, Congress has earmarked with reckless abandon. Perhaps the grossest example of Congress's irresponsible wasting of taxpayer funds was in 2007, when conference committees more than tripled the number of additional C-17s requested by House and Senate authorizers and appropriators. We have attached a chart to illustrate how Congress has been the wind beneath the wings of this Airlifter program from that point forward.

Additionally, the undersigned groups are concerned about the unintended ramifications of Congress's continued earmark support for this program. For example, last December the Air Force sent a letter to Congressional Defense Committees explaining that because Congress appropriated funds to procure

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unneded and unanticipated C-17 Maintenance Training Devices, there are neither current facilities nor military construction funding to support bed-down of these devices. As a result, long-term storage of even a single Maintenance Training Device is expected to exceed \$120,000 per year for the next seven years.

President Obama demanded that the bill not be “loaded up with unrelated items.” It’s hard to see how billions for unneded aircraft serve our national interests, particularly in a time of war. Again we urge you to eliminate unnecessary weapons and earmarks from the Department of Defense Appropriations Bill. We urge you to support Senator McCain's amendment to strip funding for additional C-17s.

Sincerely,

Danielle Brian
Executive Director
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Ryan Alexander
Executive Director
Taxpayers for Common Sense