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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6050

July 12, 2007

The Honorable Robert M. Gates
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Mr. Secretary,

We are writing to express concern over the Combat Search and Rescue replacement vehicle (CSAR-X) program. The CSAR-X program has been identified by the Air Force as a top priority --second only to the replacement program for the air refueling fleet. However, complaints by Lockheed Martin Corporation and Sikorsky Aircraft Corporation, validated in part by the Government Accountability Office (GAO), call into question whether the Air Force has used a capabilities-based approach for this acquisition that is traceable, repeatable, and defensible.

The GAO upheld the first protest by Lockheed Martin and Sikorsky, and the Air Force made minor adjustments to the Request for Proposal (RFP). Both companies believe the adjustments by the Air Force failed to address the problems, and protested again. The latest protests are still pending.


If the complaints of flawed requirements, a flawed acquisition process, or a combination of the two have merit, the result may be a replacement search and rescue vehicle that is not best suited to meet the needs of the combat search and rescue mission. While we and other members of the Airland Subcommittee want to avoid any long delays in this procurement, it is not only our responsibility, but our obligation, to ensure that the Air Force procures the right platform for this vital mission.

Because of the unusual protests that surround this program we believe that the Department of Defense (DOD) and Congress must take action to ensure that the requirements have been properly identified and that the selection and procurement process were conducted in a fair, thorough, and reasoned manner. In this spirit we intend to offer an amendment to the Fiscal Year 2008 National Defense Authorization Act that would prohibit the expenditure of any funds for the CSAR-X program during fiscal year 2008 until the later of 60 legislative days after the DOD approves the Air Force decision or the DOD provides the

congressional defense committees with a written notice in accordance with established procedures.

We urge you to take a personal interest in the serious concerns that have been raised, and to delay any acquisition decision until all protests have been fully addressed and the proper DOD officials and Congressional oversight committees can properly review the forthcoming GAO reports.

Thank you for your attention in this matter. We share your commitment to ensuring that the process of procuring the next generation combat search and rescue vehicle is completed properly. We anticipate hearing from you on this issue and look forward to continuing working with you in support of our nation's armed forces.



JOSEPH I. LIEBERMAN
Chairman,
AirLand Subcommittee



JOHN CORNYN
Ranking Member,
AirLand Subcommittee