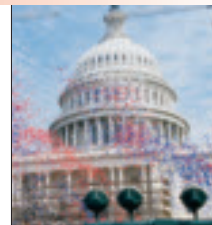


## The difficulties of letting go



WITH CAPITOL HILL DEBATE OVER FY11 budgets looming, lawmakers are trying to chisel out a compromise with the White House on human spaceflight. The Obama administration has said it wants to terminate the Constellation program, which includes eventually sending astronauts to the Moon and beyond.

### **Crux of the issue**

At the crux of a potential Washington compromise is the extent to which the designing and developing of spacecraft—historically the purview of NASA alone—should be farmed out to, or at the least shared with, private entrepreneurship.

The House of Representatives and the Senate began the August recess before reconciling their slightly different approaches to a compromise, but some key points have emerged. A NASA edict cautions agency workers that the term Constellation is no longer to be used in documents referring to future human spaceflight efforts.

To salvage elements of Constellation—including two types of booster rockets and the Orion crew exploration vehicle—lawmakers argue that their differences with the White House are less about space exploration than about jobs. Typical is a July 2 letter from Rep. Pete Olson (R-Texas) sent to Vice President Joseph Biden. Olson wrote that scrapping Constellation “threatens as many as 30,000 jobs across the country, includ-



Rep. Bart Gordon

ing Houston, home to NASA’s Johnson Space Center.” Olson also took issue with the \$100 million President Obama would shift from the manned program to economic development for those affected by the termination of space shuttle flights.

At press time, it appeared that a proposed, and hotly debated, \$19-billion NASA authorization Senate bill would give the administration much of what it wants: the first government funding of spacecraft to be developed by private companies, an end to NASA’s Moon program, and the long-expected end to the space shuttle program. However, the bill would also authorize one last shuttle flight to provide support to the ISS. That launch would occur after the currently scheduled final flight, whose previously mandated deadline of October 1 has already been extended to February.

The House was crafting its own NASA policy guideline, which would “restructure”—as used here, a euphemism for “retain”—the Constellation program. Reps. Bart Gordon (D-Tenn.) and Ralph Hall (R-Texas) told reporters they “want to continue Constellation or, at the very least, see NASA develop its own spacecraft.” Under this proposed House bill, private sector companies would receive less federal funding to develop spaceflight technology.

Before talk of compromise began, the White House submitted to Congress a proposed FY11 NASA budget that narrowly increased the agency’s total

funding to \$18.7 billion while redirecting that increase toward R&D and stronger support for commercial spaceflight. Those who want to address federal deficit spending—widely viewed as a hot topic for voters in the coming November congressional elections—say the president’s proposal, if left unchanged, would bring economic ruin on communities in Texas, Alabama, Florida, and other areas that depend heavily on space. At one demonstration near Cape Canaveral, citizens had signs and bumper stickers with slogans like “Stop Obama. Save NASA.”

In Washington, with an election approaching and tempers short over other issues, the future of NASA evokes strong feelings but does not divide conveniently along partisan lines. The administration’s plan to privatize manned spaceflight won plaudits from conservatives like Newt Gingrich, who called it “a brave reboot,” but drew brickbats from others such as former Republican Majority Leader Tom DeLay, a longtime NASA champion who represented the district that includes the Johnson center. Democrats affected by the cuts have raised an outcry—among them, Florida Sen. Bill Nelson, who called the plan “dead wrong”—while others cheered the proposal to refocus the agency on other priorities such as climate change issues.

### **F136 and C-17**

After executives testify, lawmakers are expected to enact the FY11 Pentagon appropriations bill late this fall. In what took legislators on both sides of the aisle by surprise, the nation’s capital may be spared a bruising, too-familiar annual battle between Congress and the White House over two aerospace programs—the F136 alternate engine for the F-35 Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter and the C-17 Globemaster III airlifter.

Two successive administrations—both with Robert Gates as secretary of defense—have held that one engine, the F135 from Pratt & Whitney, is sufficient



Rep. Pete Olson

for the 4,000 F-35s planned for nine countries. Supporters of the F136, produced by General Electric/Rolls-Royce, insist that offering an alternate engine can lower costs.

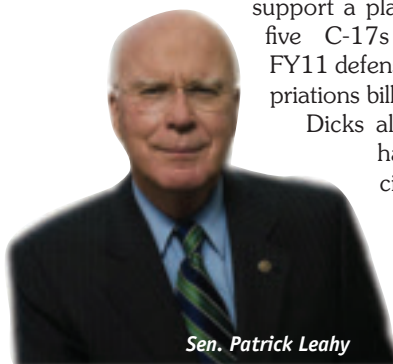
Those who favor an alternate engine are as disparate as Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.), and the British government, which is a JSF stakeholder. Since the mid-1970s, the ubiquitous F-16 Fighting Falcon has been built and operated with two engine types, an arrangement that provided a 21% savings benefit, according to the Government Accountability Office.

For airlift, the Bush and Obama administrations both argued that the current scheduled buy of 223 gives the U.S. more Globemasters than it needs. Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) agrees.

Gates insists that the JSF alternate engine and the C-17 are out. "I will ...strongly recommend that the president veto any legislation that sustains the continuation of the C-17 or funding for the F136," Gates said in a meeting with reporters. "It would be a serious mistake to believe the president would accept these unneeded programs simply because... legislation includes other provisions important to him."

Leahy acknowledges that pro-F136 forces probably cannot muster enough support on Capitol Hill to overcome the administration this year. In July, Rep. Norm Dicks (D-Wash.), chairman of the House defense appropriations subcommittee and a stalwart C-17 supporter (Boeing builds the C-17 in California but also manufactures aircraft near Seattle in Dicks' district), surprised everyone in Washington by revealing that he will not support a plan to add five C-17s to the FY11 defense appropriations bill.

Dicks alone may have sufficient clout



Sen. Patrick Leahy

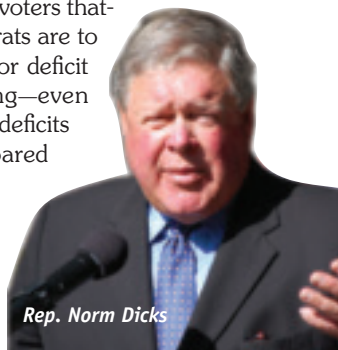


Over the past several years, Congress has paid for 43 C-17s that two administrations said they did not want and the Air Force insisted it did not need.

to reverse the trend of the past several years, during which Congress paid for 43 C-17s that two administrations said they did not want and the Air Force insisted it did not need. Dicks' initial version of the FY11 spending bill contains no money for F136 engines or C-17 transports.

The federal deficit is fueling the national debt at a rate greater than ever before—a July White House projection for a \$1.47-trillion deficit this year means that every dollar spent by the government now includes 41 cents in borrowed money. Thus, Democrats do not believe they can fare well in the off-year election by merely "nipping around the edges" of defense spending, as House Majority Leader Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-Md.) put it.

In a June 28 speech, Hoyer said defense spending can no longer be exempt from "hard choices" confronting the rest of the federal budget. Hoyer acknowledged that Republicans believe they can capitalize on a belief held by voters that Democrats are to blame for deficit spending—even though deficits have soared



Rep. Norm Dicks

under both parties. If F136 and C-17 legislative battles can be headed off, lawmakers on both sides of the aisle are likely to give broad support to other money-saving measures that will come from Gates but have not yet been defined. Among possibilities: retirement of all 65 of the Air Force's B-1B bombers, which are effective in Afghanistan but costly to operate.

### Marine leaders at the fore

Only weeks after Gen. Stanley McChrystal, the U.S. commander in Afghanistan, was pressured to resign, Pentagon boss Gates sent mixed signals by nominating two Marines—one of them a well-known aviator—to four-star billets.

First, Gates picked Gen. James F. Amos to become the next commandant of the Marine Corps, replacing Gen. James T. Conway.

The choice was seen initially as a snub of Gen. James N. Mattis, commander of Norfolk, Va.-based U.S. Joint Forces Command. Mattis is a blunt-talking seasoned war veteran who led Marines into the bloody battle of Fallujah in Iraq in 2004. He won attention with a 2005 speech when he said of Taliban militants, "It's a hell of a lot of fun to shoot them." Mattis and outgoing commandant Conway are both crusty, their gruffness an asset within the Marine Corps' insular culture but sometimes an irritant in Washington politics.

(Continued on page 17)