

On February 5, 1997, the test team noted wing drop in an official deficiency report.

On March 12, the Navy reported that wing drop "adversely impacts the minimum acceptable operational performance requirement."

Two weeks later, Secretary Cohen approved the recommendation of Paul Kaminski, the Navy's chief procurement officer, to go ahead and purchase the first dozen production versions of the E/F for a figure of \$1.9 billion.

Kaminski's decision followed a meeting with the Navy's test team in which this wing-drop problem apparently wasn't even mentioned.

On November 20, almost a year and a half after this wing-drop problem was first discovered, John Douglas, Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development and Acquisition, then informed Navy Secretary John Dalton of the wing-drop problem. This program-threatening wing-drop problem seems to have been kept, Mr. President, from the top Defense Department staff, including the Secretary, until after the decision was made to initially procure the first 12 aircraft.

If this sort of manipulation of the process is really taking place, it is obviously totally unacceptable. I have asked a full account of the discovery and progression of the wing-drop problem from the Secretary of Defense. In light of these allegations, I also urge the Department of Defense to fully consider the panel's findings and halt the purchase of any additional Super Hornet aircraft scheduled for this month until this wing-drop problem is fully understood and corrected. To do otherwise would compromise the safety of our Navy's pilots and the integrity of the Department of Defense.

Having mentioned a number of issues, including this very serious wing-drop problem, I want to briefly conclude my remarks by reemphasizing the exorbitant cost of this new Super Hornet aircraft.

The Navy initially plans to procure 62 aircraft in three separate procurement lots. Secretary Cohen is delaying procurement of the second round of 20 aircraft pending identification of a solution to this wing-drop problem. The final aircraft buy is scheduled for late 1998 or early 1999.

DOD claims that failure to provide full funding for the second round of planes would result in a production break and then would involve considerable additional costs. The total cost, though, of these planes is already \$15 billion more than estimates that were given just 2 years ago—\$15 billion more from just 2 years ago. How much worse can this get?

The original cost estimates were based on unrealistically large projections of the number of aircraft to be purchased, low inflation assumptions for later years, and the Navy's failure to factor in the effect of its decision to buy more of the higher cost F models of the Super Hornets.

GAO estimates that the Navy could save almost \$17 billion if the Navy were to simply procure the F/A-18 C/Ds rather than the E/Fs. This savings alone could have easily paid for the fiscal year 1998 Transportation or Interior appropriations in their entirety.

I know that some of my colleagues will say that by halting production of the Super Hornet and instead relying on the current C/D, we will somehow be mortgaging the future of our naval aviation fleet, but GAO clearly states that this is not the case.

Given the program-threatening design problems and its enormous cost and marginal improvement in operational capabilities that the Super Hornet would provide, it seems that this new airplane is just not justified. Operational deficiencies in the current C/D aircraft either have not materialized or they could be corrected with nonstructural changes to the plane. The question is whether the current C/D can serve that function as it has demonstrated or whether we should proceed with an expensive new plane for a very marginal level of improvement.

The \$17 billion difference in projected costs does not seem to provide a significant return on our investment. The Super Hornet is, in effect, a solution in need of a problem. The Super Hornet program should be ended. The Defense Department and the Navy should also remain above board with the taxpayers when problems arise during the development of a new aircraft.

As a result, proceeding with the Super Hornet program is not the most cost-effective approach to modernizing the Navy's tactical aircraft fleet. In the short term, it has been made very clear the Navy can continue to procure F/A-18 C/D aircraft while upgrading it to further improve its operational capabilities. For the long term, the Navy can look forward to the next generation of strike fighters, the joint strike fighter, which will provide more operational capability at far less cost than this Super Hornet that they want to go through with right now.

The most efficient and fiscally appropriate bridge is an upgraded C/D. The question is whether we can afford a \$17 billion hit that can't be justified.

We should discontinue the E/F program before the American taxpayers are asked to shell out additional tens of billions of dollars for an unnecessary and flawed program.

I thank the Chair, and I yield the floor. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. GRAMS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. GRAMS. Mr. President, what is the current order of business before the Senate?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Senate bill 1768 is pending.

Mr. GRAMS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 5 minutes as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

THE EDUCATION IRA BILL

Mr. GRAMS. Mr. President, as you know, the Senate has before it and is debating a very important bill to promote educational alternatives. It is a bill which advances educational options, one which would encourage families to be actively involved in their children's education.

It comes at a critical time. Test results released last month show that American high school seniors score far below their peers from other countries in math and science.

Education Secretary Riley called the scores "unacceptable," and indicated that schools are failing to establish appropriate academic standards.

S. 1133 is the Senate's version of the education-IRA which has already passed in the House. The bill, commonly referred to as the A+ savings accounts, would expand the college education savings accounts established in the Taxpayer Relief Act of 1997 to include primary and secondary students.

A+ accounts would also increase the maximum allowable annual contribution from \$500 to \$2,000 per child. The money could be used without tax penalty to pay for a variety of education-related expenses for students in K-12, as well as college expenses.

The Senate bill closely resembles what is currently happening at the state level in Minnesota. Our state is establishing itself as a leader in bringing educational opportunity, authority and choice to parents. Last summer, the Minnesota legislature approved Governor Carlson's two-year package of tax cuts valued at \$160 million. The package includes a 250% increase in educational tax deductions. Parents can now deduct between \$1,625 and \$2,500 each year per child, depending on the child's grade. These deductions may be used for all education expenses, including tuition.

Senate consideration of the A+ legislation comes at a notable time, a time of increasing focus on the future of America's children. Last October, the White House held a summit intended to bring children's issues into the forefront as a national priority.

Well, what better way to turn consensus-building into action than to give parents practical tools, such as the A+ accounts, which enable them to better provide for their children's education.

Unfortunately, tired, groundless attacks against the A+ accounts continue to hang on. The charge I hear most frequently is that "education savings accounts and tax breaks for parents would shift tax dollars away from public schools." That is simply not the case.

More education dollars under parental control would promote education by encouraging parents to save, invest in, and support programs and materials that facilitate and provide the right option for child's education. Nothing would be taken away from public education resources.

The A+ accounts help working families. They encourage savings and enable families to make plans which shape a child's future. They are directed at low and middle income families, not wealthy families which currently have more education options. It seems ironic to me that some of the loudest opponents of these savings accounts are high-income, high-option individuals, who can afford to send their own children to private schools.

According to the Joint Committee on Taxation, the great majority of families expected to take advantage of the education savings accounts have incomes of \$75,000 or less. These are the families who need savings options and incentives the most.

Mr. President, the A+ accounts simply provide a modest, tax-free savings plan for families. This is a common-sense approach to the serious issue of educating our children. It offers a real solution for America's working families, and I urge my colleagues to give it their support.

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to speak as if in morning business and to introduce two amendments to be considered at the time the NATO expansion issue is before the Senate for consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Alaska is recognized.

PROTOCOLS TO THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY OF 1949 ON ACCESSION OF POLAND, HUNGARY, AND THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I am going to speak for a few minutes about the issue of NATO expansion, and I want to offer these two amendments today. These amendments, I believe, will serve to bring greater accountability to the unresolved issue of the additional costs that will result with the accession of Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic to the NATO alliance.

My first amendment requires all costs related to either the admission of new NATO members or their participation in NATO to be specifically author-

ized by law prior to the payment of these costs. I am speaking of the U.S. costs. Our U.S. costs would have to be specifically authorized by law before they could be paid.

Actually, this ought to be the proper interpretation of the Constitution. But too often we find that costs—particularly those of foreign policy objectives supported by the Department of Defense—are incurred and then we are asked to pay for them in the budget process later.

The costs related to NATO enlargement are still general estimates, but the debate is continuing as to what is actually required and what portion of these requirements should be paid by the NATO common budgets. These estimates will continue to evolve and change in the coming months, well past the completion of the NATO expansion debates here in this Chamber.

U.S. costs could increase as NATO finalizes its implementation plans and eligibility criteria for common funding, or if new member countries have problems paying for infrastructure improvements. A Congressional Budget Office study released last week confirms that the United States is likely to incur bilateral costs for expanded exercises, training, and programs to incorporate NATO compatible equipment into the central European militaries.

My amendment would ensure a more accurate accounting for, and explanation of, the actual costs related to NATO enlargement as the process continues to develop.

My second amendment will restrict the use of funds for payment of NATO costs after September 30 of this year unless the Secretaries of Defense and State certify to the Congress that the total percentage of NATO common costs paid by the United States will not exceed 20 percent during the NATO fiscal year. Historically, NATO has not systematically reviewed or renegotiated member cost shares for the common budgets. This amendment would effectively require a reduction of the U.S. percentage paid in support of NATO common budget costs from a historic average of 24 or 25 percent. And I believe it is actually higher than that, but that is the average that they use. This is a reassessment that is long overdue in light of U.S. global defense responsibilities.

We have to remember that NATO was formed at the time when we were coming out of World War II, before the United States had started really to carry out its global responsibilities. When Spain joined NATO in 1982, there were pro rata adjustments to the civil and military budget shares based upon Spain's increased contribution. No other formal renegotiations have occurred since 1955 in these two common budget areas. The NSIP—or NATO infrastructure budget—has been adjusted five times since 1960, but that was due more to the way projects were approved and funded than any actual attempt to reallocate the percentages.

With the amount included in the emergency supplemental that we will consider today, the United States will have expended over \$7.5 billion for operations in and around Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia by the end of fiscal year 1998. Mr. President, it is estimated that the United States is paying over 50 percent of the costs of maintaining the peace in Bosnia—nearly \$200 million a month in 1997 alone—and there is no end in sight to the U.S. presence there with the President's decision to keep deployments there indefinitely.

Our defense overseas funding in NATO countries—the cost of maintaining our forces there, including the operations and maintenance, military pay, family housing, and military construction—now averages nearly \$10 billion a year. Security assistance to the NATO allies since 1950—this is the military assistance and military education and training—has totaled over \$19 billion.

No other member of NATO has the global defense role of the United States, nor does any other member have the forward-deployed presence in potential flash point areas such as the Middle East or the Korean peninsula.

There is just no alternative but to take the two steps that I am going to ask the Senate to propose to the House and to the President by these two amendments.

I would like to introduce the amendments.

The first is an amendment that I mentioned to require prior specific authorization of funds before U.S. funds may be used to pay NATO enlargement costs. It is cosponsored by Senators BYRD, CAMPBELL, ROBERTS, THURMOND, and WARNER.

The second amendment is the amendment to require that certification of payments to NATO will not cause the U.S. share of NATO common budget accounts or activities to exceed 20 percent, and that is cosponsored by Senators BYRD, CAMPBELL, ROBERTS and WARNER.

I thank the Chair. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. COLLINS). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. KENNEDY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Massachusetts is recognized.

SUPPORT FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

Mr. KENNEDY. Madam President, I know that we are debating very important issues on the supplemental appropriations bill. But I would like to take a few moments this afternoon to address another important issue, the Coverdell bill. There is a very important question we must all ask. Will Congress support public education or