

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 16, 2009

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to voice our support for the VH-71 presidential helicopter replacement program.

The Marine One presidential helicopter is more than just a symbol of the office or a simple means of transport; it is integral to the safety and security of our president and thus our nation. That is why we urge you to resist any attempt to politicize the VH-71 presidential helicopter program by singling it out among the large number of major programs that have exceeded their original budgets. This program is too important to be derailed by politics.

We share your strong commitment to increasing accountability in the use of tax dollars and applaud your promise to reform the broken defense acquisition system. In recent years, too little attention has been paid to ensuring the wise management of major defense priorities. In many cases, excessive requirements are packed into programs at enormous expense and with little ultimate value to the warfighter.

However, we are alarmed by the political controversy surrounding the VH-71 program and fear it could lead to a decision that jeopardizes the security of our Commander in Chief and wastes valuable taxpayer money. There is little doubt that the need to replace the aging legacy fleet of presidential helicopters is real, urgent, and thoroughly documented. The current fleet has been in service more than 35 years and it is time for an upgrade to best protect the President and his family. This country cannot afford its President to be vulnerable or cut off from communications in a time of emergency.

VH-71 was initiated by the White House in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks and was awarded to the current industry team in 2005 after one of the most rigorous and scrutinized competitions in history, which was not protested by the losing contractor. Congress has repeatedly noted that excessive requirements coupled with unrealistic price and schedule estimates have driven current cost projections for the program's second phase beyond what is reasonable. Nevertheless, we believe canceling the program entirely would be irresponsible and self-defeating.

To date, \$3 billion has been invested in the VH-71 program and yielded notable results. Eight of the nine aircraft comprising the first phase of the program, Increment 1, have achieved flight and are meeting or exceeding all performance parameters. The fiscal year 2009 House Defense Appropriations bill noted that Increment 1 is a "marked improvement" that "exceeds the


performance of the current fleet in virtually every respect." Based on the outstanding performance of this aircraft, we urge you to consider expanding the Increment 1 fleet to make it the long-term solution if the more advanced Increment 2 aircraft cannot be procured in a cost-effective manner.


Furthermore, we believe the Navy could purchase a full fleet of 23 Increment 1 helicopters within the original budget profile. Doing so would send an important message that security and fiscal responsibility are compatible when it comes to our national defense. Without question, simply canceling VH-71 at this advanced stage would be the least responsible alternative both for the safety of your office and the investment of the American taxpayer.

Marine One is an important national security asset serving the Office of the President and is directly linked to the security of our nation. The VH-71 Marine One program was initiated by a previous administration, will enter service during your administration, and will serve future presidents for decades to come. You will have our complete support – and the support of the American people – as you move forward with this critical program.

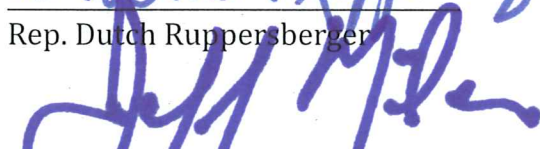
Sincerely,

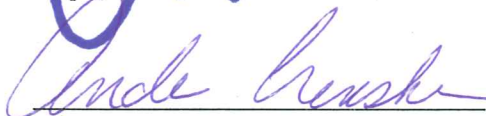

Rep. Patrick J. Murphy


Rep. Bill Shuster

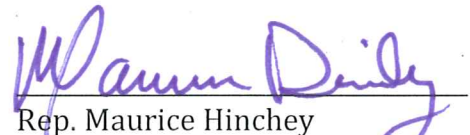

Rep. Robert Brady



Rep. Dutch Ruppersberger

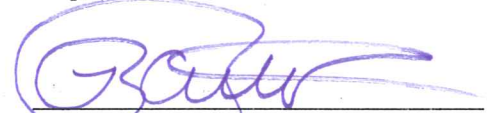

Rep. Jeff Miller


Rep. Ander Crenshaw


Rep. Dan Maffei

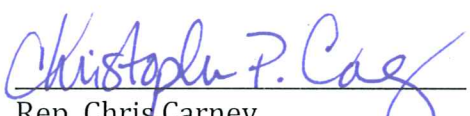

Rep. Maurice Hinchey


Rep. Jo Bonner


Rep. Roscoe Bartlett


Rep. Michael Arcuri


Rep. Doug Lamborn


Rep. Chris Carney

Cc: The Honorable Robert M. Gates
Secretary of Defense

The Honorable John J. Young
Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics

The Honorable BJ Penn
Acting Secretary of the Navy

The Honorable Rahm Emanuel
White House Chief of Staff

Gregory B. Craig
White House Counsel