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Signs of a deal in the works over F-22 spending

5:27 pm July 16, 2009, by Jim Galloway

We'll know more after Secretary of Defense Robert Gates addresses the topic this evening in Chicago, but it looks like we may have a compromise brewing in Congress over increased spending for the Marietta-built F-22 Raptor.

The Associated Press just moved the following:

Despite adding money for two programs that the White House has said will result in a veto of the defense spending bill, a key House Democrat said Thursday he's confident the legislation will avoid that fate.

"We'll work it out," John Murtha, head of the House Appropriations defense subcommittee, told reporters following a markup of the bill. "In the end, the bill won't be vetoed."

The panel included \$369 million as a down payment for a dozen more F-22 fighter jets, and \$560 million for an alternate engine for the Joint Strike Fighter, both actions which the White House has said will lead to a veto.

Murtha's optimism, which comes after a Senate committee also recently added F-22 funding in its version of the bill, sends a signal to the administration that Democrats want to engage in a compromise negotiation on the fighter jet issue, industry analysts say.

Any concession won't mean buying 20 more planes, but perhaps ordering fewer jets over several years to gradually close the production line, said defense consultant Jim McAleese. The outcome must be perceived as in line with Defense Secretary Robert Gates' goal of shifting resources to the Joint Strike Fighter.

Murtha believes lawmakers will be able to persuade the White House to add money to buy spare parts for the F-22 and complete an initial batch of presidential helicopters that President Barack Obama has said are not needed.

Obama has repeatedly threatened to veto a defense spending bill that includes money for the F-22, built by Lockheed Martin Corp., if lawmakers succeed in their effort to buy more planes beyond the 187 requested. Republicans and Democrats representing districts with jobs tied to the program are fighting hard to keep the F-22.

Any compromise will have to bridge both party and ideology. Many out there would like to characterize this as a fight between hawks and doves, between conservatives and liberals. But the following is from a post on the blog operated by the Cato Institute:

If Obama is serious about getting a handle on the enormous federal budget deficit, confronting Congress over the clear wastefulness of the F-22 is certainly a good place to start.

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