

by Rep. Tom Rooney

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With federal red ink for April alone reaching a record \$82.7 billion and the annual deficit expected to soar to an historic high of \$1.56 trillion this year, Americans are fed up with wasteful spending in Washington.

They are tired of the unnecessary, taxpayer-funded projects that have caused this runaway spending. One wasteful program in particular has not only added to the problem but also diverted resources from other critical tools needed by our military – an egregious earmark in the defense budget for an “alternate engine” for the Joint Strike Fighter aircraft.

In 2001 after a competitive bidding process, the military chose Pratt & Whitney’s F135 engine for the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter. However, Congress continued to earmark billions of dollars to a partnership of General Electric and the British-based Rolls Royce to build an extra engine for the Joint Strike Fighter.

Since then, despite bipartisan opposition, the extra engine has become the earmark that refused to die. President Bush tried to kill the program during his last two years in office. President Obama and Secretary Gates have urged Congress to eliminate the earmark and have threatened to veto any legislation that includes funding for the extra engine. Despite this veto threat, the Defense authorization bill before the House this week allocates an additional \$485 million.

In total, Congress has spent more than \$3 billion so far on the extra engine, and the Pentagon projects it will need an additional \$2.9 billion to complete the unnecessary program.

The alternate engine’s proponents claim that funding the project creates competition that can lower costs for the taxpayer, but studies have shown that an alternate engine will not save taxpayer dollars. I support competition, but competition does not mean buying two of everything.

The Joint Strike Fighter has an engine that is working well and successfully powering the plane through all its test flights, while the alternate engine – because of developmental problem – will not even be ready to compete for at least another five years.

As a veteran of the U.S. Army Judge Advocate General’s Corps and a member of the House Armed Services Committee, I am dedicated to defending our national security and to providing our war fighters with the support they need to achieve their missions. I don’t want to see the Defense budget cut; I want to increase it. But I want to make sure that every dollar spent is spent wisely to help protect our country and support our troops.

The Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps have consistently said our servicemen and women don’t need an extra engine on the Joint Strike Fighter, and it not only wastes scarce dollars but also complicates their missions. Defense Secretary Gates has said that spending billions of dollars

more on this wasteful project would make it more difficult to provide them with the support that they do need. Marine Corps Brig. Gen. David Heinz stated that funding the alternate engine project would “take 50 to 80 tails out of the program.”

That’s right: In order to build a backup engine for a plane that already has a properly working engine, Congress would have to sacrifice 50 to 80 needed aircraft.

Controlling federal spending and protecting our national security are among Americans most urgent concerns. Congress can serve both purposes by eliminating the earmark for the extra engine once and for all, now and forever.

Congressman Tom Rooney (R-FL) serves on the House Armed Services Committee. He has served on the U.S. Army Judge Advocate General’s Corps and taught constitutional and criminal law at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.