

# White House Threatens Veto Over F-22 Jet Fighters

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WASHINGTON (AP) — Preparing for a possible showdown with Congress, the White House threatened on Wednesday to veto legislation authorizing a \$680 billion military budget if it contains money for jet fighters the U.S. Defense Department does not want.

In a statement, the White House Office of Management and Budget said the \$369 million that a committee in the House of Representatives added to the bill as a down payment for 12 additional F-22 fighters runs counter to the "collective judgment" of the military's top leaders.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates wants to end production of the radar-evading F-22 after 187 aircraft have been built. Last week, in a preview of the White House's veto threat, Gates called the funding boost a "big problem."

Gates has pointed to the F-22, which has not been used in Iraq and Afghanistan, as an example of a Cold War-era weapon that does not fit well into 21st century warfare against terror groups and other elusive threats.

The F-22, built by Lockheed Martin Corp., has broad support in Congress. The primary manufacturing plant is in Georgia, but key parts of the plane also are made in Texas and California. Lawmakers have pointed to the instability around the world as a reason for keeping the jet program alive. Continued production also means jobs in areas hit hard by a weak economy.

The F-22 is a twin-engine jet the Air Force would use for air-to-air combat missions. Service officials say the aircraft can dominate wide swaths of airspace, a critical capability in areas that ground forces cannot quickly get to. Each aircraft costs about \$140 million.

The White House statement came as the House was scheduled to begin debating the 2010 defense authorization bill approved by its Armed Services Committee. The legislation includes \$130 billion for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and a 3.4 percent pay raise for service members.

Another provision in the House bill the White House strongly objects to adds \$603 million for a backup engine intended for another fighter jet in development, the F-35. The committee says the alternative engine is needed in the event the primary propulsion system has problems that might ground the aircraft.

White House officials say the extra engine is not needed and will delay the completion of the F-35, a single-engine aircraft to be used by the U.S. Air Force,

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Navy and Marine Corps.

The House legislation, which sets the Pentagon's budget for the 2010 fiscal year starting Oct. 1, also provides \$9.3 billion to protect the United States and its armed forces overseas from ballistic missile attack.

Republicans are pushing to increase the missile defense money by \$1.2 billion. The minority party's leaders argue that the Obama administration and congressional Democrats have shortchanged the account at a time when North Korea poses a serious threat.

The 2010 defense authorization bill would prohibit the Obama administration from moving terror suspects being held at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, to the United States until 120 days after it gives Congress a plan outlining the risks of doing so.

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