Kansas Backs Boeing In $35b Tanker Battle

John Milburn, Associated Press Writer

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — With hundreds of new jobs at stake, Kansas officials are keeping an eye on the competition for an Air Force contract to build a new refueling plane.

Chicago-based Boeing Co., which has a plant in Wichita, is competing with Los Angeles-based Northrop Grumman Corp. and Airbus parent European Aeronautic Defense and Space Co. for the $35 billion contract to build new air refuelers and replace the Air Force's aging fleet of 179 tankers.

Northrop and Airbus are offering a tanker based on the Airbus A330. Boeing may offer tankers based on its 767 or 777 jets or both.

Kansas Gov. Mark Parkinson met this summer with the secretary of the Air Force to discuss military issues in the state, including the tanker project. Parkinson said Monday he and former Gov. Kathleen Sebelius' administration have been strong supporters of Boeing's bid.

"I will continue to work with Boeing and our Congressional delegation as they focus on ways to bring this important project to Kansas," Parkinson said.

If Boeing received the contract, its Wichita plant likely would add jobs to finish construction of the aircraft, which would replace the Eisenhower-era planes currently flown by the Air Force and Air National Guard from Kansas bases.

In addition, Wichita-based Spirit Aerosystems is a major supplier to Boeing and is expected to make many of the components that would be used on the new refueler.

Jeff Glendening, vice president of political affairs for the Kansas Chamber, said the tanker contract would be a good project for Kansas, especially given the way the recession has affected the state's aviation industry.

"We've been trying to show our support to Boeing in every way that we can," Glendening said.

The Kansas House and Senate passed a nonbinding resolution last year urging the Air Force to give strong consideration to the Boeing bid.

Washington also is supporting Boeing's bid.

Gov. Chris Gregoire said last week that she continues to work on the tanker bid, which would mean additional Boeing jobs in the Puget Sound region. Washington lost an important fight for a second 787 production line when Boeing picked a site in South Carolina.

"There will be other competitions to come and the first up is the tanker and I not only expect Washington to compete, I expect Washington to win that tanker," Gregoire said.

Her spokesman Glenn Kuper said Tuesday that Gregoire was meeting with the Washington Council on Aerospace to develop a strategy and with Boeing officials to learn what other steps could be taken.

Rep. Todd Tiahrt, who represents Kansas' 4th District in the U.S. House, joined 38 Boeing supporters in Congress in sending a letter to President Barack Obama, asking him to force the Air Force to consider a September ruling by the World Trade Organization regarding Airbus.

The WTO found Airbus received illegal subsidies from European governments to build its aircraft. Boeing supporters said the ruling was a clear indication that Airbus had an unfair advantage in bidding on the tanker deal.

___

Associated Press correspondent Rachel La Porte in Olympia, Wash., contributed to this report.

Source URL (retrieved on *07/22/2014 - 7:09am*):
http://www.impomag.com/news/2009/11/kansas-backs-boeing-35b-tanker-battle?qt-digital_editions=0