

By Rep. Joe Courtney

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After more than a decade of back-and-forth and more than \$3 billion in unnecessary spending, the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter alternate engine officially breathed its final breath this year.

Officially.

An embodiment of wasteful redundancy, the engine did not go down without a fight, dying despite the tireless backing of Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) and support from 40 of the 87 freshman Republicans who ran on platforms of eliminating government fat.

Rarely is a policy in Washington as cut and dried — or transcendent of party lines — as the alternate engine. Across the past two administrations, opposition to this unneeded engine was a rare, continuous common thread. Under Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, Defense Secretary Robert Gates quickly and frequently lobbed veto threats at legislation that included funding for the F136 alternate engine. The rationale was simple: The engine's cost was exorbitant and the engine they had (the F135) easily met the Pentagon's requirements.

The forced pursuit of a second engine only threatened to further hamstring the Pentagon as they sought smart ways to rein in spending.

Supporters of the second engine argue that competition in the F-35 engine system is needed to keep costs down and hedge against potential problems with the F135. Competition is one thing; unneeded redundancy in a time of fiscal limitations is another. In fact, every U.S. fighter engine

program during the past 50 years, except for the F-16, has been sole-source. More than 14,000 sole-source engines produced by GE have been purchased and performed exceptionally for our Blackhawk helicopter fleet. Double-source engines are exceedingly rare.

Yet, three months after a clear-cut and bipartisan vote of 233-198 in the House to end the program and a month after the Pentagon's formal cancellation of the engine, the House Armed Services Committee has attempted to breathe stale new life into the debate. I was one of just five committee members to vote against an amendment allowing GE and Rolls-Royce to continue self-funded development work on their engine. Although no taxpayer funding would be specifically allocated to the program in fiscal 2012 under the committee bill, GE would enjoy continued access to government equipment, facilities and personnel.

The committee's action must not be misconstrued as a new endorsement of the program. It has been rejected repeatedly by the president, the Pentagon, the House and the Senate. The debate is done, and the reason is clear. In addition to being staggeringly wasteful, the alternate engine program actually creates new obstacles for the Department of Defense and our men and women in uniform.

The chief of naval operations, Adm. Gary Roughead, told CQ Politics in 2009 that the logistics of aircraft carriers made even storing parts for a second engine an impossibility. According to his remarks, having two separate engine programs for the Joint Strike Fighter would require costly duplication in maintenance, training and supply infrastructure. "Space is at a premium," he said. "You can put me squarely in the one-engine camp."

Proponents of the alternate engine also argue that a single-source aircraft is a liability. Their argument ignores the fact that today's military boasts a number of successful single-source aircraft, including the F-18 and F-22. It also ignores the fact that, after a decade of development, the likelihood of a serious design failure is exceedingly small.

I asked the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Adm. Mike Mullen, directly in February to clarify that point and comment on whether there is any need for the alternate engine. He told the Armed Services Committee: "The first engine will be more than adequate to meet the needs" of the F-35, and added: "If I thought any different, I would be encouraging the second engine. I just categorically can't see that it will make any difference."

I applaud Adm. Mullen, Adm. Roughead, Secretary Gates and many others for acknowledging the strategic and financial burden this program created and for advocating its elimination. As we have already seen, some will continue to seek to rehash this fight, perhaps in perpetuity.

Today, our nation faces important fiscal choices. Those who demand we address these challenges must also accept the responsibility to make the tough and smart choices in our defense budget. With clear bipartisan opposition in the House and Senate to the extra engine, senior military leaders firmly on record in support of its elimination, and with our military actively engaged in three conflicts around the globe, it is time to end definitively this fruitless pursuit and move on from this decade-long debate to more pressing defense budget issues.

Rep. Joe Courtney (D-Conn.) has been a member of the House Armed Services Committee since first becoming a Member of Congress in 2007. The main engine for the F-35 is assembled at a Pratt & Whitney plant in East Hartford.

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