

ALLEN, DODD, LARSON ANNOUNCE INITIATIVE TO BOLSTER U.S. AVIATION CAPABILITIES

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Legislation would provide resources for research and development, jobs and national security

WASHINGTON, DC - Emphasizing the impact on national security and quality jobs, Senators George Allen (R-VA) and Chris Dodd (D-CT), and Congressman John Larson (D-CT) have introduced legislation that would establish comprehensive goals to strengthen America's aeronautics and aviation research and development (R&D) abilities and assure America's competitive leadership in aviation.

"America cannot complacently wait. America must be competitive in aeronautic research, development and the beneficial innovations that result from these efforts. Aeronautics as an industry is a net exporter for the United States. Losing our competitive advantage would cost us important jobs and weaken our military capabilities," said Allen. "We must create an environment that is friendly to aeronautics so that the United States remains the leader in this field."

"Maintaining America's competitive leadership in aeronautics and aviation is an issue of great importance," said Dodd. "In addition to its obvious national security benefits, the industry makes a critical contribution to our economic growth. This bill represents our commitment to the nation's economy and the security and safety of our aviation and aeronautics sector."

"The national security of our nation and the strength of our economy are strongly tied to the continued health of the aeronautics and aviation industries. In recent years, America's global dominance of the all-important industry has slipped as both public and industry research and development funding has fallen and economic challenges from Europe have emerged. This bill acts to counter the decline in American research and development spending by adopting an aggressive strategy to ensure America maintains our leadership in the aerospace and aviation fields," said Larson.

The United States has traditionally dominated the aircraft industry, but over the past decade, funding for NASA's aeronautics R&D program has been cut in half while the number of U.S. graduates in aerospace engineering and related fields has dropped by 57 percent at the bachelor's level and 39 percent at the master's level. With the current aeronautics workforce aging and retiring, the U.S. faces a tremendous decline in expertise and industry knowledge. Today, America controls less than 50 percent of the global market in the commercial aircraft industry.

Anna VB McNider, President of the NASA Aeronautics Support Team, noted, "Aeronautics research has been cut almost 50% over the last six years, and NASA's FY04 budget request proposes level funding at this inadequate amount; we are encouraged that Congress is beginning to recognize the need to increase investment in this research at a time when air transportation issues are reaching crisis proportions."

The Aeronautics Research and Development Revitalization Act of 2003 will help NASA coordinate their efforts on developing new technologies with the Department of Defense, Department of Transportation, the Federal Aviation Administration, academia, and industry. The legislation would also benefit both military and commercial aviation by assisting R&D that would result in a more efficient air-traffic control system, better communications, and stringent safety and security standards. Allen and Dodd's bill reverses the trend of declining Federal investments in aeronautics and aviation R&D by doubling funding over five years and provides resources to universities to develop training methods for new technologies and scholarships for engineering graduate students studying aeronautics.

Aerospace Industries Association President John W. Douglass said, "The bill will revitalize the nation's aeronautics research and development programs. It corresponds with the recommendation of the federal Commission on the Future of the U.S. Aerospace industry that the government significantly increase investment in basic aerospace research."

The Aeronautics Research and Development Revitalization Act is endorsed by the following organizations: American Society of Mechanical Engineers, Aerospace Industries Association, Aircraft Electronics Association, Air Traffic Control Association, Inc., American Association of Engineering Societies, American Astronautical Society, American Helicopter Society, American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, American Society of Civil Engineers, American Society for Engineering Education, General Aviation Manufacturers Association, Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers-USA, NASA Aeronautics Support Team, NASA Alumni League, Navy League of the United States, and Society of Automotive Engineers.