
Defense Report

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Congress Shows How Not to Reform Military Procurement

Last October, when the Senate began to reorganize the Department of Defense, the ranking Armed Services Committee members made some very candid comments about the changes required of Congress itself if we are ever to improve the effectiveness of our Armed Forces.

Senator Sam Nunn made the point that "If we are going to demand reform in DoD, we are going to have to reform ourselves." Committee Chairman Barry Goldwater was equally emphatic when he said: "Congress is compounding the problems of DoD and major changes in the way we conduct our business are long overdue."

It would be nice to report that Congress has, in fact, gotten its act together. Nothing, however, could be further from the truth; probably the height of hypocrisy is Congressional criticism of the military establishment for inefficient and costly procurements.

Two recent Congressional actions ably illustrate the point. The Air Force has made it clear that there was no need to buy the T-46A jet trainer, which is manufactured in New York state. But, since the plant is in the Congressional sphere of Congressmen Sam Stratton and Tom Downey, those gentlemen were successful in getting the House Armed Services Committee to add funding which would require purchase of the T-46A whether the Air Force wants it or not.

Another illustration of Congressional micro-*mis*management involves the Army's effort to select a replacement for the venerable .45 caliber pistol. After extensive testing, the Army selected the Italian Beretta 9-mm as our standard sidearm and over 20,400 have already been delivered. Smith & Wesson, one of the losers (although given two chances), is in the Congressional purview of Representatives Silvio Conte and Edward Boland of Mass., who pressured the House Appropriations Committee to include language reopening the contract and giving Smith and Wesson a third crack at it.

These are but two examples of how Congressional critics of Defense procurement policies are making weapons purchases a pork barrel issue. By doing so, they are misleading the American public and making a mockery of Defense reform.