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## ARMY, AIR FORCE PUSH TO RESTORE MONEY FOR CARGO PLANE

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The Army and Air Force are working to persuade authorizers and appropriators to fund the joint cargo-aircraft program fully.

The Senate Armed Services Committee cut \$109 million from the Army's request for \$113 million for the plan and sent shudders through the Army's aviation leadership, which had budgeted on getting the money from a canceled helicopter program.

"I am working with all those folks," Brig. Gen. Stephen Mundt, director of Army Aviation Task Force, said during a Pentagon press conference on Friday, "They all have different issues. ... That is why it is so fun."

Sen. Richard Shelby (R-Ala.), a defense appropriator, recently said that "the joint cargo aircraft is a good program and I am going to do everything I can to fund it."

The Army has been pushing for the program for a couple years and was joined by the Air Force this year.

Senate authorizers said it is premature to buy any planes until the needs of both services are analyzed. They did not slash the Air Force's request of \$15 million for what it calls the light cargo aircraft.

It was Sen. John McCain's Armed Services Airland Subcommittee that initially recommended the cut. Mundt said he has met McCain and will do so again as necessary. "He wants to make sure that all the analysis has been done," Mundt said.

He characterized his meetings with McCain as a "very good dialogue."

An Army analysis found that it needs 145 new planes to replace its aging C-23 Sherpas and C-12 Hurons. The Air Force accepted the Army's analysis, as did the oversight Pentagon panel. Now the Air Force is conducting its own study to see how many planes it will need, Mundt said.

He stressed that both forces would buy the same aircraft. Differences may occur only in the kind of accessories the two need, he added.

The two services are expected to sign a memorandum of agreement. The Army has already done its part, but the Air Force has a longer vetting process, Pentagon officials say. "Words are very important," said Mundt, who signaled that the Air Force should be signing soon.

He painted a dire picture if the Army is not able to secure the full funding. The service urgently needs the aircraft, he said, and lack of money would delay delivery by two years. The Army wants its first aircraft in 2008; the Air Force is slated for 2010.

Vying for the contract are a team of L-3 Communications, Alenia North America and Boeing, offering the C-27J Spartan; a team made up of Raytheon and the European Aeronautic Defence and Space Co. (EADS), offering the C-295; and Lockheed Martin, which came late into the game with its short-fuselage version of the C-130 J.

Mundt said the Army does not want any C-130s in its inventory and that Lockheed Martin would have to prove that a shorter version of the cargo workhorse can fit the Army's requirement to land on runways of 2,000 feet. He has been explaining this to congressional supporters of the C-130.

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