



House Jet Purchase Opposed

“Bipartisan opposition is emerging in the Senate to a plan by House lawmakers to spend \$550 million for additional passenger jets for senior government officials,” the Wall Street Journal reported on August 10. The move to upgrade the government’s fleet of jets was included in a defense-spending bill, but the Pentagon has said it doesn’t need half of the new craft.

The Obama administration had originally wanted to replace a fleet of older planes with four new passenger jets at a cost of \$220 million. Before Congress took its August recess, House lawmakers doubled the order to eight jets for \$550 million.



“The whole thing kind of makes me sick to my stomach,” said Senator Claire McCaskill (D-Mo.) in an interview on August 9. “It is evidence that some of the cynicism about Washington is well placed — that people get out of touch and they spend money like it’s Monopoly money.” Senator John Thune (R-S.D.) described the doubled plane purchase as “a classic example of Congress being out of touch with the realities of deficit spending.”

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Other senators voiced concern and said they will oppose funding the jet buy after the recess, among them Senators John McCain (R-Ariz.), Jack Reed (D-R.I.), Richard Burr (R-N.C.), and Christopher Bond (R-Mo.). Several House Republicans have come out against the purchase, including House Minority Leader John Boehner (Ohio) and Representative Marsha Blackburn (Tenn.), a senior member of a group of House conservatives.

Those who support buying the jets say some of the old planes are grounded right now and the new craft would save money in the long run because they are cheaper to operate. “The key here is not whether or not planes will be bought, it’s when planes will be bought,” said Ellis Brachman, speaking on behalf of the House Appropriations Committee, which approved the spending. Brachman noted that the planes are mostly used by the military, with congressional trips representing about 15 percent of Air Force passenger flights.

Though the current jet purchase is running into strong head winds, both Republicans and Democrats have defended the trips they take around the globe, saying the excursions strengthen ties with foreign nations, allow the lawmakers to observe firsthand how U.S. funds are being spent abroad, and enable face-to-face meetings with U.S. military leaders and troops.

These reasons may seem logical, but there are some constitutional factors to consider. The U.S. already has a diplomatic corps, and lawmakers aren’t ambassadors. This is the job of diplomats, not legislators. Regarding money spent abroad, the United States shouldn’t be spending such massive amounts overseas when we have a deficit at home. There is no justification in the Constitution for sending



Written by [Steven J. DuBord](#) on August 14, 2009

taxpayer money to foreign lands; such aid belongs to the realm of private charity. And representatives and senators should almost never have to go to a foreign country to visit American troops because those troops don't belong there in the first place, short of a congressionally declared war. A brief flight within the boundaries of the United States should be all it takes to visit the vast majority of our troops, save those who are aboard naval vessels at sea.

To the degree that Congress claims to need new jets to travel around the world, those jets are most likely an unconstitutional expense. But what really needs to be grounded is the unconstitutional use of taxpayer money for foreign aid and the unconstitutional use of the American military as a global police force. Shoot down those violations of our Constitution and Congress will have a lot less need to waste taxpayer money on globetrotting.



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