



F-35 Lightning II Program

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OFFICIALS EMPHASIZE COMMITMENT TO JOINT STRIKE FIGHTER

WASHINGTON, May 9, 2012 – Senior leaders from the Air Force and Navy affirmed yesterday that the F-35 joint strike fighter remains the centerpiece of the tactical aircraft program and will play a large part in the services' ongoing modernization plans.

Navy Vice Adm. David J. Venlet, F-35 Lightning II program executive officer, told the Senate Armed Services Committee's airland subcommittee that the F-35's basic engine designs were deemed sound and deliverable after a battery of tests and observations over the past year.

"While there is still risk in the program, it is risk-balanced," Venlet said. "I have confidence in the resilience of the plan to absorb further learning discovery and stay on track."

Still, Venlet said, the program will "not execute itself," and will require resources, tools and processes to enable disciplined decisions on development and incremental capability delivery.

Technical and cost issues exist, the admiral acknowledged, but he added that the joint strike fighter's enhanced capability can be the backbone of fifth-generation fighters.

Carrier test pilots conducting approaches at Patuxent River, Md., have lauded the handling characteristics of the F-35's aircraft carrier variant, he said, and short takeoff and vertical landing results have demonstrated solid performance.

"It is a testimony to the very effective and impressive marriage of engine and airframe," Venlet said, adding that measures will stay in place to ensure the program's long-term effectiveness. "Rigorous management control by the joint program office, supported by the service system commands, will be applied with a ... focus on production and affordable delivery capability -- our only meaningful external result."

Navy Vice Adm. W. Mark Skinner, principal military deputy in the office of the assistant secretary of the Navy for research, development and acquisition, said affordability will be a key focus in delivering capabilities.

"During these austere times, we must persist in modernizing and recapitalizing our naval aviation forces and increase our capability through force multipliers, such as the Navy Integrated Fire Control Counter-Air and using 'should-cost/will-cost' processes to bring more affordable systems to our warfighters," Skinner said.

Lt. Gen. Janet C. Wolfenbarger, assistant secretary of the Air Force for acquisition, told the panel the fiscal 2013 budget aligns with the Air Force's tactical aviation program as the service shifts its national

security strategy to counter modern-day threats.

“Our rapidly aging aircraft fleet drives the urgent need to balance procurement of new inventory with sustainment of our current fleet,” Wolfenbarger said.

