Air Force Evaluation Found Boeing Tanker More Capable, Survivable for Flight Crews

ST. LOUIS, April 03, 2008 -- While the U.S. Air Force awarded a contract to build the next aerial refueling airplane to the team of Northrop Grumman and the European Aeronautic Defence and Space Company (EADS), Air Force evaluators found the Boeing [NYSE: BA] KC-767 Advanced Tanker offers more mission capability and has a better chance of surviving combat than the larger Northrop-EADS KC-30 tanker.

"The fact that the Air Force gave Boeing the highest possible rating in mission capability and cited the KC-767 Advanced Tanker as having three times more strengths than the Northrop-EADS tanker in this most important category further highlights the inconsistencies in the selection process," said Mark McGraw, vice president and program manager for Boeing Tanker Programs. "As for protecting flight crews on the most dangerous missions, the Air Force evaluated Boeing's tanker as much more survivable than the Northrop-EADS tanker."

On Feb. 29, the Air Force selected Northrop/EADS' Airbus A330 derivative over Boeing's KC-767. Boeing subsequently asked the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to review the decision, citing numerous irregularities and a flawed process that included making unstated changes to the bid requirements during the competition that provided Northrop/EADS with an unfair competitive advantage.

"Despite the changes made in favor of the KC-30 in the area of mission capability, the evaluation was clear in its assessment," McGraw said. "The Air Force identified 98 strengths and only one weakness with the KC-767, while they pinpointed 30 strengths and five weaknesses for the KC-30, including four weaknesses in aerial refueling."

The Air Force gave Boeing high marks in aerial refueling. Evaluators cited the ability of the KC-767 to refuel the V-22 Osprey, which the KC-30 was evaluated as not being able to do. They cited the KC-767's better maneuverability while flying heavily loaded into a refueling zone, and they said its refueling flight deck displays and communications systems were better than the KC-30's. Evaluators also found three weaknesses in Northrop/EADS' boom design and an additional weakness in their ability to be a receiver due to the lighting of their receptacle.

In contrast, the Air Force said the KC-767 met or exceeded all key performance parameters in the mission capability requirements evaluation. Among some of the other key strengths: aeromedical evacuation, enhanced navigation system, better use of airport ramp space, better cockpit displays and communications systems, and more likely to integrate into operational use faster with new equipment and future growth.

"Also of significant concern for us is the fact that the Air Force settled for a plane that is ultimately less survivable for flight crews performing their vital missions in war zones," McGraw said. "In providing technology and features that can keep the airplane more survivable for the men and women flying them, the Air Force determined that the KC-30 is less survivable than the KC-767." The Air Force found that in the critical area of combat survivability, the Boeing tanker had nearly five times as many strengths as Northrop's. The Air Force said Boeing's strengths totaled 24 and gave just five for Northrop-EADS.

"The superiority of the KC-767 in the critical area of survivability compared with the corresponding 'weakness' of the Northrop/EADS plane should give warfighters and American taxpayers alike cause for concern as the GAO continues their review," McGraw added.

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