$10M More for FVL

AHS International’s Congressional advocacy campaign for the 2016 US government fiscal year was another great success! The US Congress reached a deal for the Defense budget on Tuesday, Dec. 15. As a result of efforts led by AHS International and the Vertical Lift Consortium, the budget included an additional $10M for the Army’s Aviation Advanced Technology Development — over and above what was requested by the President’s Budget — for advanced rotary-wing technology in support of Future Vertical Lift. Congress also added $3.4M for “Helicopter seat improvements” in this RDT&E funding line to reduce injuries in the event of an impact. This increased the total Army Aviation Advanced Technology funding line from the requested amount of $89.7M to $103.1M — a boost of nearly 15%.

This advocacy work builds on similar successes last year, which resulted in $14M for FVL (and about $5M for the NASA Revolutionary Vertical Lift project). In February 2015, in response to an AHS request, the Army provided the following explanation on how the additional funds were to be used:

“The Army plans to apply the $14M augmentation towards funding AVX Aircraft and Karem Aircraft for additional Joint Multi-Role (JMR) air vehicle technology risk reduction efforts; and to fund Boeing-Sikorsky and Honeywell — as well as many other partners in industry and academia through the Vertical Lift Consortium (VLC) — to accelerate risk reduction for the Joint Common Architecture (JCA).”

These legislative successes resulting in $24M in additional FVL funds were the result of AHS International’s leadership, in collaborating with the Vertical Lift Consortium — the non-profit whose mission is “to work collaboratively with the U.S. Government to develop and transition innovative vertical lift technologies to rapidly and affordably meet warfighter needs” — and our member companies.

Go to www.vtol.org/FVL for more details.

US Government Employee Restrictions

AHS also worked with nearly 150 technical societies and research organizations on the issue of US federal travel restrictions, and the impacts on science and technology (S&T) conferences. The coalition was successful in altering legislation that otherwise would have made permanent the draconian restrictions prohibiting government employees from attending S&T conferences:

(e) None of the funds made available in this or any other appropriations Act may be used for travel and conference activities that are not in compliance with Office of Management and Budget Memorandum M-12-12 dated May 11, 2012 or any subsequent revisions to that memorandum.

This 2012 White House OMB policy directive M-12-12 has had severe negative impacts on the ability of US government employees to attend training, conferences and meetings. Intended to curtail wasteful government spending, a number of studies have indicated that the restrictions have caused further bureaucratic bloat. In many cases the government is spending more money monitoring, reviewing and preventing their engineers and scientists from attending S&T meetings than if local commands had the authority to determine the necessity of travel and conference participation.

Nonetheless, since “preventing US government employees from wasteful travel spending” made for good politics, some members of Congress have been advocating for tougher restrictions, as well as making the policy memo permanent and statutory. The coalition was able to add those critical seven extra words, which gives OMB the authority to update the guidelines. The coalition has already begun discussions intended to update the memo, and is advocating for an exemption for S&T conferences.

Fortunately, the Pentagon had already realized the unintended negative impacts of the M-12-12 directive and in September had released its updated “DoD Conference Guidance 3.0” to the military departments, which delegates approval thresholds to much lower levels. Although the Department of the Army had not yet updated its travel policies by press time, other services had.

AHS has also participated in efforts to quantify the negative impacts of the travel restrictions on the scientific community, national defense and technological capabilities. Another effort initiated by AHS aims to reverse the discouragement of US government employees from participating in technical committees, chairing technical sessions/conferences and otherwise engaging with the scientific community.

More information on the Society’s efforts to support US government employees can be found at www.vtol.org/USG.