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Tinker Stealth Project Backed

By Ed Kelley

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WASHINGTON — A House panel Wednesday approved authorization of \$31.8 million next year to buy land and begin construction at Tinker Air Force Base for the Stealth bomber program.

The amount matches the figure requested by President Reagan in his final budget blueprint sent to Congress last January for Tinker, which is to provide maintenance and logistical support for the bombers.

Additionally, the Armed Services subcommittee on military installations and facilities authorized nearly \$100 million in other construction projects at Oklahoma bases for fiscal year 1990, which begins Oct. 1. Included is \$21.5 million for a Navy squadron of E-6A planes at Tinker.

Rep. Dave McCurdy, a panel member who made the announcement, said the \$130 million that was approved for Oklahoma represents nearly a 40 percent increase over funds appropriated this year. Such an authorization "demonstrates the commitment" to Oklahoma military installations, said McCurdy, D-Norman.

A spokeswoman for Sen. Don Nickles, R-Ponca City, said a similar authorization request on the Stealth program will be made in the Senate next month.

If authorization is approved in both House and Senate, the two appropriations committees would make recommendations for funding levels.

The subcommittee's action Wednesday on the Stealth, or B-2, came a day after Defense Secretary Richard Cheney said he might make public revelations about the highly secret program in order to win support on Capitol Hill.

Cheney said he approached the Stealth "with a healthy degree of skepticism" when he became secretary earlier this year. But after review of the program, Cheney said he was persuaded the bomber has such a "very significant capability"

that "it's very important we proceed" with its deployment.

The Pentagon has spent \$20 billion on the program, even though none of the planes — expected to cost more than \$500 million each — have flown. Their purpose is to evade detection by radar.

Cheney earlier proposed cutting \$1 billion from the Stealth program in 1990, which would push production back a year. However, the Air Force wants to proceed in order that construction can begin in 1990, officials said.

Details of the \$31.8 million authorized Wednesday as presented by McCurdy include funding requests of:

- ✓ \$17 million for a support facility at Tinker, which would include special fire protection.

- ✓ \$9.6 million to buy avionics, as well as 20 acres of land.

- ✓ \$5.2 million for a storage facility, where equipment used to support B-2 weaponry would be housed.

Besides the Stealth, Tinker also would receive \$21.5 million for the E-6A squadron if funding is approved.

After months of controversy, Congress last September approved release of nearly \$50 million for the E-6A squadron's home at Tinker. The first of the 16 jets expected to be housed there are to

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■ What's \$800,000 Between Friends?

Senator Patrick Leahy slammed his hand down, and his face turned red. "Don't tell me . . . if you don't know," he yelled at H. Diehl McKalip, director of operations for the Defense Security Assistance Agency, who was testifying before Leahy's Foreign Operations Subcommittee. What had got Leahy so exercised was that the General Accounting Office, acting in response to a request by Senator Tom Harkin, had confirmed the suspicions of Congressional investigators that airplane fuel provided to the El Salvador Air Force under a U.S. military aid program had been resold to Oliver North's *contra* resupply network and to the U.S. military. Return from the sales came to about \$800,000, and Leahy wanted to know what Gen. Juan Rafael Bustillo, the Salvadoran Air Force commander, had done with the cash. Bustillo refused to cooperate fully with the G.A.O. probe, but McKalip claimed that the Pentagon did know where the money had gone: It went into the operating budget of the Ilopango air base and bought such necessities as ladders and doors. But when pressed by Leahy, McKalip could not give a precise account of the number of doors and ladders purchased, and that triggered the Senator's explosion. "We give one to one-and-a-half million dollars every day to a little country smaller than my home state of Vermont," Leahy shouted. "Tell me where [the money] went. If we don't know, it's a violation of the Arms Export Control Act."

As Capitol Hill lawmakers get ready to dish out another \$386 million in aid to El Salvador, they should keep in mind the mystery of the missing \$800,000—and the contempt Bustillo displayed for Congress, whose misplaced munificence keeps Bustillo's beloved military waist-high in cash.

arrive by August 1990. Lawmakers have said the squadron-basing facilities are expected to provide 1,600 jobs and \$200 million to the Oklahoma City area economy.

Tinker also would receive, if funding occurs, \$3.45 million for

a supply warehouse for the AWACS program; \$2 million for a radar software facility for the Stealth's predecessor, the B1-B; and \$1.7 million to make changes at an industrial waste treatment plant at the base.