



vertiflite Commentary

U.S. Government Actions: A False Economy in a High-Tech World

By Mike Hirschberg, Executive Director

On March 1, the U.S. Congress failed to come to an agreement to avoid the \$1 trillion in automatic federal spending cuts known as “sequestration” that are planned over the next decade. As a result, all federal departments and agencies are enacting steep, indiscriminate cuts, with the Department of Defense bearing a disproportionate percentage. The irony of this budget crisis is the inefficiencies that it creates. Rather than always striving for the most cost-effective or even the lowest-cost strategy, the blind edict is wasting inordinate amounts of time, energy and productivity.

For example, some agencies have created vast, inefficient and intricate tracking systems that require top officials of each department or agency to approve an employee’s attendance at a conference. Scores of personnel have been assigned to track and monitor travel to conferences such as our Annual Forum. Is this really the best use of anyone’s time? As noted in this column previously, there is tremendous value in technical conferences (see the November-December 2012 Commentary – “The Value of Face-to-Face”). These absurd restrictions undermine the ability of professional societies to host meetings that serve as a crossroads for government, industry and university interaction and information exchange. One wonders if the U.S. government is now spending more to monitor and curtail travel than it was spending on actually attending conferences. According to one government researcher, “We get more



work done at the Forum in three days than we can get done in several months, because all the people are there, in one place, to pitch ideas and make decisions.”

The cost of conference attendance is fairly low – a few thousand dollars, including travel expenses, and much more cost effective than individual trips to multiple industry and university sites – but the cost of ignorance during a new acquisition program is much higher – measured in billions. Many AHS events in the U.S. are located at or near government facilities to minimize cost to the government, and they provide invaluable benefits to attendees. AHS specialists’ meetings are certainly much more cost effective than having the government arrange these topical

interchanges with researchers from industry, academia and other government organizations, or for the government to travel to individual researchers to understand the progress and challenges in these technical fields.

Government has repeatedly demonstrated how difficult it is to bring new technologies to bear in high-tech programs. It is well-understood that affordability decisions at the beginning of a program are the most effective in reducing life-cycle costs, and that understanding requirements is key to cost containment. As the vertical flight community spools up for the technology development of the Joint Multi-Role (JMR) and Future Vertical Lift (FVL) initiatives, is this really the time to be “penny wise and pound foolish” in bringing together the government’s technical workforce and the best ideas from industry and academia to discuss and clarify technology and requirements?

Professional societies like AHS International host forums for the exchange of research ideas and technical needs. We sponsor working groups to address the most difficult technical challenges, develop standards and provide archival, peer-reviewed journals to the technical community. These societies exist as non-profits, and provide services to the community in a very efficient manner. There is no other source for many of these roles and there is no guarantee that professional societies could continue to do so if U.S. policy results in poor decisions that impact our financial stability.

A new threat to professional societies was raised in a February 22 policy memo from the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP). It directs federal agencies with more than \$100 million in R&D expenditures “to develop plans to make the published results of federally funded research freely available to the public within one year of publication.” This policy is the result of a growing popular movement for “open access” to publicly funded research. *The New York Times* proclaimed in a February 25 editorial, “We Paid for the Research, So Let’s See It.” On the face of it, this seems logical: taxpayers have already paid for government-sponsored research and so should be able to see the results without further cost.

The reality couldn’t be further from the truth. AHS International pays more than \$100,000 a year to typeset, publish online, print and mail *The Journal of the AHS*. In addition, volunteers spend perhaps thousands of hours reviewing

and editing *The Journal* to ensure its technical content is vetted and its final articles are technically sound, logically documented discourses on their topics. The peer review process ensures that articles conform to existing standards of research and represent results that are meaningful, adequately described and expected to be reliable. The ability to sell subscriptions to journals and individual copies of articles (which for our Society only cover about two-thirds of the cost) is an important part of the revenue stream that makes these journals viable for non-profit, professional societies. Without that, most journals would cease publication.

These actions by the U.S. government have the potential for grave consequences for the American scientific community. Budget cuts that eliminate technical conference participation will eventually result in an uninformed government buyer. Undercutting the efforts of existing scientific journals would reduce the

revenues of non-profit technical societies, as will government restrictions on travel. Together, these limitations curtail the ability of these societies to execute their missions of providing forums for exchange of technical information and publishing the latest scientific findings and engineering breakthroughs.

Rather than reducing waste, these blind decisions ignore the benefits that professional societies offer toward achieving greater government efficiency and promoting dissemination and public awareness of the latest research. The current crisis presents an opportunity for the government to leverage the infrastructure and capabilities of societies like AHS International, and we will continue our efforts to engage with the government to achieve its technical objectives.



World’s leading supplier of helicopter engines



World leader in flight control and inertial navigation systems



World leader in aircraft wiring

Safran – Leading the World in Rotorcraft Technology

With over 40 years of manufacturing in America, Safran currently operates in 58 facilities across 22 states. Our nearly 7,000 U.S. employees help bring world-class technologies to the rotorcraft industry.

Safran. A world leader ... committed to the U.S.

Key Missions, Key Technologies, Key Talents



www.safran-na.com