EA-18G
GROWLER
VAQ-129

The EA-18G story is one where Congressman Akin took the leading role in securing thousands of jobs in the St. Louis region.

In early 2001, as a member of the House Armed Services Committee, Congressman Akin was made aware of the cost and reliability problems of the Vietnam era radar jamming aircraft used by the U.S. Navy from our aircraft carriers. Known as "Prowlers" they were difficult to maintain and required a crew of four people to operate. Also, the "Prowlers" were much slower than the attack aircraft they were supposed to support during missions.

Congressman Akin took the lead and asked his staff to pursue the possibility of replacing the aging Prowlers with F/A-18 Super Hornets, which are modified to carry the jamming pods from the old Prowlers. This alternative suggested several inherent advantages:

1. The aircraft carriers already had F/A-18's, thus reducing the types of aircraft to be supported, and saving tax payer dollars in the process;

2. The new F/A-18 Super Hornets could be used either to jam enemy radar, or in other modes to allow more flexibility in mission planning;

3. The new plane would reduce the crew of four to a crew of two by further automating the jamming process;

4. The speed of the new plane would allow it to keep pace with attack aircraft in virtually all missions.

While meeting with Boeing program officials, Congressman Akin's staff recognized there were some serious questions associated with the integration of the next generation radar jamming suite (ICAP-III) and the Super Hornet airframe. In order to avoid delays in production and increased operating costs, Congressman Akin obtained funding in the 2002 and 2003 defense funding and budget bills which insured that the engineering questions associated with the next generation jamming technology and its integration with the Super Hornet were answered. In December 2003, the Navy awarded Boeing a $1 Billion contract to begin building this new version of the F/A-18 Super Hornet which would eventually become known as the EA-18G Growler.

The funding obtained by Congressman Akin insured that the EA-18 Growler will reach the fleet on schedule, on or below budget and be a model acquisition program for the Navy. The success of the Growler also extends the life of the F/A-18 line which employs over 1600 people directly as well as the 250 or so who work directly on the Growler project at Boeing. The F/A-18 production line brings approximately $964 million dollars of economic impact to Missouri, largely concentrated in St. Louis.

As a result of Congressman Akin's diligence, the Boeing team is building the best electronic attack plane in the world, and the only electronic attack plane currently being built for the U.S. military.

In the 2008 fiscal year, at least 18 Growlers will roll off the assembly line, along with at least 24 Super Hornets, providing our Navy with an unparalleled capability to fight however and wherever it needs to. Congressman Akin was proud to lead the Congressional effort to develop the Growler which both provides high quality jobs for the St. Louis region and a high quality product for the U.S. Navy.