

**On Tuesday**, a [story](#) in the CongressDaily-PM, a publication for Washington insiders, reported that a “key House Republican plans to press Navy leaders this week on the Pentagon’s apparent reluctance to enter into a multiyear deal with Boeing Co. for F/A-18 aircraft, arguing that the costs saved are worth the risks of a long-term financial commitment.”

We were stunned to see that the “key House Republican” was Town and Country’s own Rep. Todd Akin. The last time we remember Mr. Akin being described as “key” was in 2006, when he led the [fight](#) to prohibit judges from striking the words “under God” from the Pledge of Allegiance. The House passed the bill, but the Senate never took it up.

We were further stunned to realize that on the F/A-18 issue, at least, we are mostly in agreement with Mr. Akin. No doubt he will find this as distressing as we do.

**There are** two critical issues at stake, one local and one national. The [F/A-18 Super Hornet](#) , along with its electronic warfare variant, the [E/A-18 Growler](#) , are built on Boeing’s assembly line in St. Louis.

And unless world conditions or military requirements change dramatically in the next decade, they could be the last warplanes to be built here. The assembly lines that produced the legendary McDonnell Aircraft planes like the Banshee, the Voodoo and the Phantom, and the McDonnell-Douglas F-4 Phantom II, AV-8 Harrier and F-15 Eagles could grind to a halt.

In the 1990s, the Pentagon decided to put most of its future fighter aircraft into one basket, the so-called [Joint Strike Fighter](#) . It would have variations for all the military services, all built on a similar airframe. On Oct. 26, 2001 — a dark day in St. Louis aviation industry — the Pentagon [awarded](#) the 3,001-plane contract to Lockheed-Martin Corp., which assembles the planes in Fort Worth, Texas.

**This has** turned out to be a big mistake. Lockheed’s program for the Joint Strike Fighter, now called the F-35 Lightning II, has been [plagued](#) by cost overruns and technical problems. Its delivery schedule is 18 months behind and costs have ballooned by 50 percent.

Who knows if Boeing could have done better? But warplanes built here consistently have been delivered on time and on budget, a fact that Boeing touts in selling them to foreign governments.

Now Mr. Akin, as the ranking Republican on the House Armed Services Seapower Subcommittee, is touting the F/A-18 to the U.S. government. Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates wants to go [year-by-year](#) with new F/A-18 purchases, waiting for Lockheed-Martin to get the Navy variant of the F-35 right.

Mr. Akin, along with other members of the Missouri congressional delegation, want a long-term commitment for F/A-18 purchases. That would give Boeing more money up front, allowing it to buy components cheaper and in bulk and reduce acquisition costs. Mr. Gates says it would lower costs by only 6.5 percent, less than the 10 percent threshold required for multiyear contracts.

Mr. Akin [replies](#) that it would save \$500 million and deliver a proven plane to the Navy, and half a billion dollars is nothing to sneeze at. It would also keep a vital part of the military industrial churning until at least 2017.

National interests and local interests don't always coincide. This time they do.

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Read on Post-Dispatch website:

<http://interact.stltoday.com/blogzone/the-platform/uncategorized/2010/02/on-fa-18s-todd-akin-gets-one-right/>

