

Ottawa Journal by David Tilson MP ? Liberals break promise to military

Media are reporting that the Liberals will soon enter into a sole source contract with Boeing to purchase the F-18 Super Hornet jet fighter as an "interim measure" to supplement our CF-18s.

Make no mistake ? this move is not based on the views of military experts, but rather on the political needs of the Prime Minister and the Liberal Party of Canada.

The Liberals broke their promise to hold an "open and transparent competition." The government spent little to no time consulting experts or members of the Royal Canadian Air Force to determine if this is in the best interests of Canada.

The Liberals are misleading Canadians about a "capability gap," however, our current fleet of CF-18s is fully operational. The Liberals' "capability gap" is imaginary and fabricated. This decision also proves that the Liberals' defence policy review is nothing more than window dressing designed to support conclusions that have already been made in the Prime Minister's Office. The Liberals are refusing to stand up for the thousands of aerospace workers across Canada whose jobs could be jeopardized by this sole sourced deal.

The greatest value to the Canadian tax payers and our military can only be achieved through an open competition. Conservatives will hold the government to account for its unilateral decision-making. I have several questions, including:

The Liberal cancellation of the maritime helicopter replacement in the 1990s cost Canadian taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars in legal fees and court-awarded settlement costs. The current Liberal government appears to be going down this same route. How does the government expect to make the case for a pressing "national security" concern when it recently withdrew our CF-18s from the fight against ISIS? How will the government ensure Canada continues to reap economic benefits from the Joint Strike Fighter program? How much, if any, input did defence and procurement experts at both the Department of National Defence and the Department of Public Works have in making this decision?

This politically driven decision is not about putting Canada's interests first or about listening to the advice of experts. Nor is it indicative of a forward-looking defence policy. It is purely designed to fulfill an ill-advised and completely unattainable election promise from the Prime Minister.

Lieutenant-General Michael Hood, Commander of the Royal Canadian Air Force, recently told the Defence Committee that "the end of the (CF-18s) useful life will be in 2025." Unlike Australia, which retired its obsolete F-111 fighters in 2010 and was thus required to purchase 24 F-18 Super Hornets until the arrival of several dozen F-35s, Canada does not face an urgent need for a short term fix. Furthermore, the government has yet to commit Canada to a fifth generation option that will be serviceable for decades to come. Because of investments made by the previous Conservative government, the Canadian Armed Forces do not face a so-called "capability gap." The Liberal government, on the other hand, clearly suffers from a credibility gap on this issue.

