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**Guest Column: Duplicate defense spending a big waste**

Congress has resumed session following news of our nation's deficit reaching its highest level in history. In Florida, that's no shock, as our state has seen firsthand the resulting consequences of a weakened economy. Our unemployment compensation fund is drying up, and one in 10 Floridians is out of work.

With a national deficit of \$1.6 trillion - three times higher than last year - something has to give. If we are to get out of this, our government needs to spend smarter and cut where cuts can be made.

It is in this spirit that I mention several defense earmarks that have received a fair amount of attention. Prior to the August recess, the Senate voted with the Obama administration and the Department of Defense to strip out funding for further production of the F-22 Raptor to make room for the new F-35 Joint Strike Fighter currently under development. At the same time, the Senate voted to strike funding for a little-known "alternate engine" program for the new Joint Strike Fighter.

While the Joint Strike Fighter has experienced proven success with its current engine, and the alternate engine has been called "unnecessary" by the Department of Defense and several independent studies, funding for this project persists. In fact, Congress has already spent more than \$1.6 billion on this program, and an additional \$5 billion will be needed over the next several years to have a tangible, working alternate engine. President Obama has threatened a veto if the final defense authorization bill includes funding for the alternate engine. The House has agreed to keep funding for this program in the budget.

Pratt & Whitney - a company that employs nearly 1,300 Floridians in the West Palm Beach area - is already powering the Joint Strike Fighter through its flight testing. Why reinvent the wheel at the expense of billions of desperately-needed federal funds?

As an experienced member of Florida's business community, I understand the importance of competition in the marketplace. However, the past and current presidents, the Pentagon, the military and the secretary of the Defense Department have clearly stated the alternate engine will not save our country money or improve military readiness, and I believe we should listen to them. With our nation facing some of the worst economic times in recent history, let's put these funds to better use.

- Barney T. Bishop III is president and CEO of Associated Industries of Florida.