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# PROFILE U.S. Rep. Rob Bishop (R-Utah)

MEMBER, HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

## Solidly in ATK's Corner

If President Barack Obama's plan to cancel NASA's Moon-bound Constellation program wins support from U.S. lawmakers, Rep. Rob Bishop says he stands to lose some 2,000 jobs in his northern Utah congressional district. That's because the district he's represented since 2002 is home to manufacturing facilities owned and operated by Alliant Techsystems (ATK), the Minneapolis-based space and defense contractor that had been poised to produce solid-rocket boosters for Constellation's Ares 1 and Ares 5 rockets for decades to come.

Bishop, a former Utah state legislator, says his district is still reeling from the loss of several hundred ATK jobs in his

state last fall in anticipation of the Defense Department's plan to slow refurbishment work on Minuteman ballistic missiles and NASA's intention to retire the space shuttle later this year. Another round of layoffs occurred in January when ATK gave pink slips to 420 workers at its Clearfield, Magna and Promontory facilities in Utah. A member of the House Armed Services Committee, which oversees the Pentagon's missile defense programs, Bishop says that in addition to potential job losses in his district, the Obama proposal would lead to the loss of 20,000 skilled aerospace workers nationwide and could have dire implications for U.S. national security. He spoke with *Space News* staff writer Amy Klamper.

**How many jobs does Utah stand to lose as a result of the Ares cancellation?**

About 2,000 jobs in Utah, which would be enough to energize me in and of itself. But it has, I think, a broader implication. Last year the administration cut our missile defense program on the defense side. The ground-based missiles were capped and the Kinetic Energy Interceptor was cut, even though they were just about to do their first test. On top of that was the missile defense system that would have gone to Poland, and then also the slowdown for the Minuteman 3. All of those cost jobs in my district, but I was opposed because I thought it put us militarily at risk.

This year, it's the effort to cut the Ares rocket, and the Constellation program. And if indeed we now cancel Constellation totally, we are going to put at least 20,000 people in the private sector out of work who have the expertise you need not only for the rocket side to launch man to the Moon and beyond, but also to defend this country from a missile attack. We lose the industrial base for both of them.

**What will be the impact to U.S. missile defense capabilities?**

In response to congressional insistence, there was a report sent by the Pentagon back in June that said if you delay the Ares rocket, that would have a significant negative impact on our missile defense capability. What this administration is talking about is not delaying Ares, it's talking about canceling it, so it's got to be a very significant impact on our missile defenses. The industrial base is not a spigot you can turn on and off. And if at some time you decide you made a mistake, either from the NASA side or the military side, if you can get the expertise back, it's going to be very expensive to do it. So it's not just an issue of jobs in my district. It's also an industrial base issue in terms of both space exploration and missile defense, and we're putting both of those in jeopardy with this silly scheme.

**What do you mean by scheme?**

The experts that know this area are looking at this scheme of privatization and realizing it is naive, it is incomplete, it is unproven and it is highly dangerous. What we're doing is creating NASA now as an entity that doesn't really have a clear goal. And if you're really talking about dropping solid-rocket motors and relying on liquid motors — which are more powerful but also very volatile — then that is not putting the safety of our personnel first. We're doing everything we should have learned not to do from mistakes in the past. That's why this new team — it's basically one administrator in NASA that the administration has put there — they have ideas that simply are naive. They have not thought them through. And you are putting a whole lot of people out of work for no just cause. The president talked about how this is going to be the year for jobs. You don't fire 20,000 people in the private sector to create jobs.

**Is it at all realistic for Congress to think it can get the administration to reverse course on Constellation?**

I don't know, to be honest. But that's one of the things we're going to be doing, getting together and mapping out the strategy moving forward. We're not just going to sit down and roll over for this idea. How we move forward with that, you may see some different strategies and they probably will change in the weeks ahead.

**You are one of roughly two dozen House lawmakers to warn NASA about the legality of shutting down Constellation prior to congressional approval. Are you concerned that the agency is beginning this process?**

It is illegal for NASA to start dismantling this program based on last year's law that was passed. There are so-called tiger teams established to do that. So, yes, NASA is starting to implement this already. And they have a nice way of skirting around it, but in reality they are starting to implement it. It violates the law, and the nice thing about it is as difficult as it will be for Congress to reverse a decision that comes out of the budget from the administration, it's going to be a bipartisan effort to reverse it. People on both sides of the aisle are livid about what this proposal will do.

**What, if anything, should the government do to shore up the health of the solid-rocket motor industrial base?**

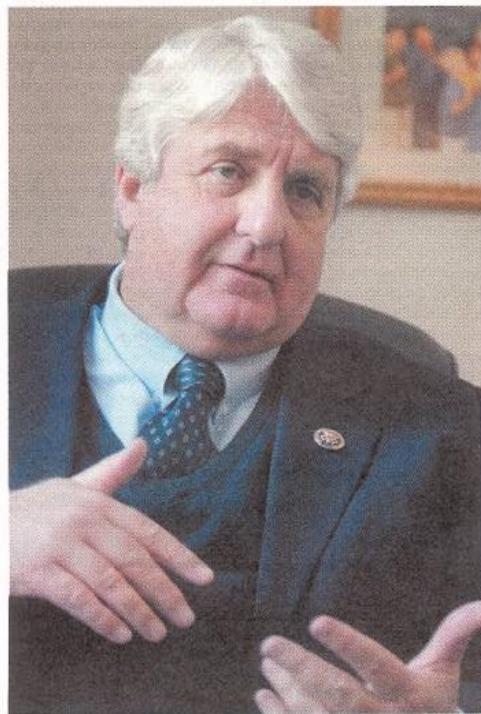
The government does not have a role necessarily in making sure the private sector stays healthy. The government does have a role, though, in making sure that we are keeping up technologically, especially on the defense side. I know from every one of the private sector companies that are involved on the defense side that they are very much worried about their employees who are getting older. Especially when the president starts talking about how we need to have more kids become involved in science, math and engineering. That's cool, but when the nation only builds a new plane every 30 years or a new ship every 40 years or a new rocket every 20 years and then cancels it, there is no reason for someone who is bright and excited to be enticed into the world of engineering in a job that doesn't engineer anything.

**One of the underpinnings of the Obama proposal for NASA has to do with relying more on international partners and sharing research and hardware development in an effort to save money. What do you think about this aspect of the proposal?**

It's all well and good, but my first priority is to make sure we have an American industrial base. And a reliance on foreign allies to pick up the slack is a frightening policy.

**Why do you think relying on the private sector to ferry Americans to low Earth orbit is a bad idea?**

If NASA or the administration actually had a plan in mind of how you implement this, that would be one thing. But



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they don't have a plan; they don't have an idea; they don't have anything that's been tried; they don't have anything that's been tested; they haven't gone out into the so-called commercial ventures and said, "OK, develop something. Show us what you've got. OK, you've developed it we'll buy into it." What they're basically saying is, "We'll take what we know we've done and throw it away and let's hope to hell somebody picks up the ball and runs with it." That's why their alternative is not an alternative it all. It's naive, it's dangerous and certainly it's unproven.

**But isn't there an advantage to having NASA invest in developing new capabilities for space exploration if those capabilities have a national security application as well?**

Yes, there is an advantage, but they're going about it backward again. What they want to do is what should have been done before you decided upon Constellation and Ares. You don't cancel the only thing that can replace the space shuttle and then decide we'll start from scratch. It's almost as if these guys are saying, "Constellation was a Bush administration decision and ergo it was bad, we'll start from scratch." It's too late to do that. Once you decide the space shuttle will stop and we're going to rely on the Russians to get us around in the future, that is too late in the game to start redesigning. You don't do that simply because somebody has this harebrained scheme that we can do it better and faster.

**Industry advocates have called on the president to establish an enterprise for coordinating all national space activities at a senior level across government. Do you think this is a good idea?**

Before this decision of the Obama administration I would not have said that was necessary. Right now, to bring some mature decision-making to the issue, that might not be a bad idea. I am just perplexed and disappointed in this rush to a decision that I just don't think people have thought out in any particular way. Having said that, within the private sector there are all sorts of people who have different motives. So sometimes whoever is presenting an idea, you take it with at least one grain of salt. But it would be good to have at least somebody who does have expertise and a little bit of maturity who can look at all the different aspects, because I really think this particular decision by the administration was driven not by those types of individuals.