

The competition to replace the Air Force's aging fleet of aerial refueling tankers entered yet another chapter last week when the Air Force released the draft KC-X Aerial Tanker Request for Proposal (RFP).

As all of us in south Alabama have learned, the tanker competition has been a lengthy process, and the end is still not in sight.

The first attempt to award a tanker contract involved a \$20 billion-plus plan to lease and buy modified Boeing 767 tankers. That one-sided KC-767 lease deal collapsed in 2004 amid an ethics scandal that sent a former top Air Force official and Boeing's former chief financial officer to prison.

The following year, Congress terminated the Air Force's authority to lease tankers. In 2005, the North American division of European Aeronautics Defence and Space Company (EADS) selected Brookley Field as the site for its new aerospace engineering center and the site to construct the next Air Force tanker.

A few months later, Northrop Grumman – one of our nation's leading defense contractors – teamed with EADS to compete for the tanker contract.

In January of 2007, the Air Force issued its final request for tanker proposals, and 13 months later – in February of 2008, the Air Force announced it had chosen the Northrop Grumman/EADS team to build the next generation refueling tanker.

Days later, Boeing filed a protest of the award with the Government Accountability Office (GAO), and in June 2008, the GAO sustained the protest.

The Pentagon cancelled the tanker competition over one year ago, and last week's release of the draft Request for Proposal (RFP) indicates the process to replace our military's aging refueling tankers is once again moving forward.

In drafting the new rules for the competition, I am encouraged by the Air Force's decision not to include provisions based on the World Trade Organization's preliminary report.

The American warfighter is in desperate need of these tankers. Some of the tankers in our current fleet are celebrating their Golden Anniversary, certainly not the state-of-the-art aircraft

we expect our military to take to the enemy.

I am hopeful this draft RFP will maintain a level playing field for both competitors, and I look forward to reviewing the draft RFP in its entirety to ensure the Air Force is conducting a fair, evenhanded competition that brings out the best in both companies and results in a winner that provides the best value to our military.

Increasing Use of Czars Is Troubling:

My office has been hearing from a number of people throughout the First District regarding the Obama Administration's increasing use of "czars."

These special appointments, which include advisors, chairmen of White House boards, special envoys and Cabinet agency deputies, report directly to the president; however, unlike cabinet secretaries, judges, and other presidential appointments, these "czars" completely bypass congressional oversight.

Article II, Section 2 of the Constitution entrusts the U.S. Senate to provide advice and consent on executive nominations; however, these executive appointments circumvent the normal vetting process required for Senate confirmation.

Like so many of you, I am deeply troubled by this. In my opinion, the president lacks constitutional authority to name these individuals to senior policy-making positions without the nomination and Senate confirmation process.

These high-level advisors have been named with little information as to their qualifications, powers, pay, or accountability. Because these advisors are not subject to congressional oversight, it is hard to determine exactly how many "czars" there are.

It appears there are approximately 34 "czars" currently overseeing a myriad of issues ranging from energy and the environment to diversity and drugs. With salaries up to \$172,000 in addition to staff, office, transportation and travel budgets, these "czars" are costing the American taxpayers millions of dollars.

For these reasons, I am a cosponsor of H.R. 3226, the Czar Accountability and Reform (CZAR) Act of 2009, which would prohibit federal funds from being used to pay for any salaries or expenses of these individuals who have been inappropriately appointed to such a position without the advice and consent of the Senate.

Currently, the bill has 113 cosponsors and is before the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.