

# Army Times

## Plan to move health care money to FCS nixed

By [Rick Maze](#) - Staff writer  
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On a party-line vote, the House Armed Services Committee rejected a plan Wednesday to restore \$200 million out of \$867 million that was cut from the Army's Future Combat System — with the outcome decided, in part, on the fact that some of that \$200 million would have come out of the defense health care program.

Rep. Todd Akin, R-Mo., who proposed the amendment, said the Government Accountability Office, the investigative arm of Congress, had identified \$209 million in unobligated balances within the defense health care system as surplus, and that he wanted just \$66 million of that. The other \$134 million that he wanted to shift to the Future Combat System program would have come from a proposed delay in the joint high-speed vessel, a potential Army ship to be used in shallow waters for transportation. The first ship of the class was once planned for 2008, but that has since been delayed.

Akin said he was trying to get \$200 million to partly restore the cut in Army modernization that amounts to a 24 percent reduction in funding. "With a cut of that size, you are really talking about going back to the drawing board," Akin said.

On a 33-26 vote, Akin's amendment was rejected. Republicans voted with him and Democrats voted against.

Rep. Vic Snyder, D-Ark., chairman of the House Armed Services personnel subcommittee, said the unspent money is sitting there, in part, because the service surgeons general were ordered to reduce spending as part of what the Defense Department has called an "efficiency wedge." The 2007 wartime supplemental that was vetoed by President Bush tried to partly restore some of that money.

"Everybody wants to find free money to do good things," Snyder said, but added that the defense health care system is not a cash cow for other programs.

"Does anyone really think we have defense health care money out there we are not going to use?" asked Rep. Gene Taylor, D-Miss. "I don't think so."

Rep. Neil Abercrombie, D-Hawaii, chairman of the airland subcommittee, who had recommended the \$867 million reduction in the Future Combat System, said reductions were not made across the board, but in specific programs to reduce program management costs and eliminate redundancy.

“The FCS program has faced serious technology, cost and schedule problems in the past,” Abercrombie said. “The Army is in trouble, the active-duty Army, the Guard and reserve. It has serious readiness problems and has massive underfunded bills for repairing equipment damaged in combat, adding more troops to its ranks and finishing its modular force conversion.”

While Snyder and Taylor said the defense health care money should not be touched, Akin got support from Rep. John McHugh, R-N.Y., the former chairman of the personnel subcommittee, who said that if the services had not obligated \$209 million of its health budget, all of the money was unlikely to be spent by the end of the fiscal year on Sept. 30, and that at least \$66 million would certainly be left over and returned to taxpayers.

This is not the final word on the Future Combat System, as Army officials have begun mounting a campaign to get the money restored.