The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

# U.S. Bill Would Cap Russian-Made Rocket Engines for Satellite Launches

By The Moscow Times

December 03, 2014



A U.S. GOES-8 weather satellite in space.

WASHINGTON — A compromise defense policy bill in Congress would bar the purchase of more Russian-made rocket engines to launch U.S. satellites, clearing the way for competitive bids for 14 future launches, senior congressional aides said.

The proposal is one of several new agreements included in a compromise version of the 2015 National Defense Authorization Act due to be filed in the House of Representatives and expected to be debated as early as this week.

The NDAA, which is approved annually, sets U.S. defense policy and authorizes spending levels, but it does not actually appropriate funds. It has to be approved by both chambers before going to U.S. President Barack Obama for his signature. Lawmakers will be asked to approve it without amendments, the aides said Tuesday.

The measure authorizes a base defense budget of $521 billion, including $17.9 billion for nuclear weapons activities in the Department of Energy, the aides said on condition of anonymity.

The measure also authorizes $63.7 billion in spending for U.S. wars overseas, mainly Afghanistan and the fight against Islamic State rebels in Iraq and Syria. The aides said the funding was at the level sought by the president.

The bill would bar United Launch Alliance, a joint venture of Boeing Co and Lockheed Martin Corp, from using Russian RD-180 engines to send U.S. government satellites into space unless they were bought before Moscow's invasion of the Crimean peninsula this year.

"Those engines that were already procured under contract at the time of the Crimea invasion are allowed to be used," said one aide. "Anything subsequent to that cannot be used."

ULA has an $11 billion contract with the U.S. Air Force for 36 launches. The aides said the decision to bar purchases of RD-180 engines from Russia after the invasion of the Crimea meant ULA could seek competitive bids for 14 launches.

Privately held Space Exploration Technologies, or SpaceX, has sued in U.S. federal claims court to be allowed to compete for some of the launch work.

The aides said the 2015 NDAA included authorization for $220 million to help develop a rocket engine to replace the RD-180. They said the NDAA compromise helped deal with two issues.

"We think that this is a way that we can address the competition concerns without rewarding the Russians for their behavior," one aide said.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2014/12/03/us-bill-would-cap-russian-made-rocket-engines-for-satellite-launches-a41934