

From June 25, 2008 Pentagon Press Brief

Q Has the secretary been briefed? Is he going to get counsel from Mr. Young or from Ms. Payton? When can we expect him to weigh in on this? Will he be the ultimate arbiter of this, how's it going to work out?

MR. MORRELL: Probably by the time I get off this podium, this stage, he will begin his first briefing with Mr. Young, who heads up AT&L, with the Air Force, with our lawyers.

It will be the first time he has had a chance to hear from them, about the GAO's recommendations as well as the preliminary analysis that's been done within the department on how those recommendations would potentially impact the Air Force's February decision to award the new tanker contract to Northrop Grumman and EADS. So that will begin a few moments from now.

And I think though, Luis, although we have 60 days with which to, in which to respond to the GAO, I think you will see, the secretary wants to move as quickly as possible.

But keep in mind, this is a complicated matter. I think the GAO decision was nearly 70 pages long, and it only dealt with a small slice of this massive contracting process.

That said, the secretary is just about to begin reviewing the various options available to him and will chart a course as to the way ahead as soon as possible.

Q So the decision will come up to him, rather than staying internally within the Air Force.

MR. MORRELL: I mean, this is something the secretary is going to be involved in.

Any more on the tanker.

Q Does the secretary have the final decision on this? I mean, it's a procurement issue.

MR. MORRELL: It's a procurement issue that's been going on seven years now, seven years probably too long. And we have been -- our men and women in uniform, who depend on this now-ancient fleet of tankers, needs a new tanker as soon as possible.

This delay will certainly not help matters, and he is determined to make sure that we are able to figure out the best course ahead in the wake of these recommendations as quickly as possible.

Q He'll be the decision-maker on --

MR. MORRELL: Well, I'm not going to get into who's going to be the decision-maker. He is intimately involved in this process. It's something that is -- that warrants his involvement. He wants to make sure that there are no further delays to replacing this vitally important piece of equipment, on which our warfighters depend every single day.

Q Is it your understanding, Geoff, that the GAO report suggests that the process has to start over again, or is that what the secretary's determining with the lawyers right now?

MR. MORRELL: Well, I think the GAO has recommended that the contracts be opened up and rebid and the whole process begin -- be opened up again.

Listen, at this point, we are still of the mind that this was a full -- this was a fair and transparent process that produced the best tanker for our warfighters at the best cost to the taxpayer. That said, the GAO has identified some areas of concern in the contracting process, and we are going to closely examine the areas of their concern and the recommendations that they've provided and see what the best course of action is from here.

Q Geoff, just to clarify, if there would be a decision to rebid or something, can the secretary make that decision and just say, "Okay, no, I think we want to rebid," or does he need any other authorities, or can he just do that on his own?

MR. MORRELL: Ultimately, he's the boss. And ultimately, if it requires his decision, he will make sure that a decision is made that moves this process on as quickly as possible, while at the same time addressing concerns raised by some of the watchdog groups.