

Boeing enters bid for Marine One

Rob Varnon, Staff Writer

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Sikorsky Aircraft Corp.'s toughest rival for the VXX U.S. presidential helicopter contest is back in the game after the Boeing Co. secured the license for Italy-based [AgustaWestland](#)'s AW101 helicopter.

AgustaWestland, which had been partners with Maryland-based [Lockheed Martin](#), in 2005 flew a version of its AW101 helicopter to victory over a version of Sikorsky's S-92 for the contract to carry the president. Sikorsky had owned that contract to provide Marine One, the president's helicopter, since the Eisenhower administration.

But in 2009, after significant cost overruns and delays, the [Pentagon](#) pulled the contract from Agusta and now is taking steps to rebid what's expected to be a 28-aircraft deal in excess of \$6.1 billion, the value of the 2005 contract. The first phase was to issue a request gauging interest in the contract, which is what Sikorsky and Boeing have filed with the Pentagon.

This time around, Lockheed has partnered with Sikorsky and the companies are offering the VH-92, a version of the S-92, for the competition.

On Monday, Boeing announced its agreement with Agusta, which will put the AW101 and S-92 version up against each other again.

"The VH-92 was the frontrunner and it may still be, but the race just got a whole lot closer," said [Raymond Jaworowski](#), senior aerospace analyst with Newtown-based Forecast International.

He said this sets up a formidable contest between the major players.

In essence, Jaworowski said Boeing is taking on the job of manufacturing the AgustaWestland aircraft, which provides the Pentagon cover if it decides to pick the AW101 again. A factor working against Agusta was the high-profile way it lost the contract, he said, which would make it hard for the U.S. Navy to sign another deal for its helicopter.

Boeing's participation appears to let people move past that, said Jaworowski, who still likes the VH-92 in the contest. But it's a tight competition now with Sikorsky having experience delivering the existing helicopter fleet. Boeing also has experience delivering a presidential aircraft, being the primary contractor on Air Force One, Jaworowski pointed out.

"Boeing has a long and extremely successful relationship with AgustaWestland, which has manufactured both the AH-64 Apache in the United Kingdom and the CH-47 in Italy under license from Boeing. We are thrilled to have a trusted participant on our team with valuable insights into the aircraft and the program," said [Dave Palm](#), director of business development and strategy for Boeing Rotorcraft Systems.

Andrew Lee, a spokesman for Boeing Rotorcraft, said Boeing is going to offer three helicopters to the Navy for the contract. It's going with what is now being called the Boeing 101, the [Bell-Boeing Osprey](#) and Bell's Chinook. All three are unique helicopters and Lee said the company believes it's giving the customer a good set of choices.

When asked about the cost overruns the last time the AW101 had the contract, Lee said, "We'll be able to submit a competitive bid." He said Boeing's track record with defense systems will help.

Sikorsky spokesman [Paul Jackson](#) declining to comment on their competitor's plans.

"But I'll note that Sikorsky and Lockheed Martin have the experience, infrastructure and skill to deliver a low-risk, common-sense solution that leverages the government's previous investment and provides the latest technology for this vital mission," he said.