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Jul 1, 9:28 PM

## Feeney tests flight simulator at Harris Corp.

By Rachael Lee Coleman  
FLORIDA TODAY

Rep. Tom Feeney settled into the black leather seat, looked out at the digital Las Vegas landscape and flew Lockheed Martin's F/A-22 Raptor mach 1.5 over the Hoover Dam and the Nevada desert.

With his right hand on the "pickle," he fired five missiles and shot down four enemy planes -- a \$200,000 misfire.

"That's not bad for government," he said with a laugh.

Feeney, R-Oviedo, tested ZedaSoft's flight simulator at Harris Corp. in Melbourne on Tuesday for an inside look at technology Congress eventually will have to fund.

"Congress has control of a \$1.3 trillion budget," Feeney said. "Big-ticket items like this one are important. There will be debates about whether they are necessary. This gives me the advantage of understanding. I love this technology stuff."

The \$124 million F/A-22 Raptor is scheduled to replace the Air Force's front-line fighter, the F-15 Eagle. The stealth plane flies mach 2 and can destroy enemies in the air and on the ground. It is the most well-known item in the defense budget and is designed to give American pilots an edge. It even flies in reverse.

"Are you going to teach the French how to fly this backwards in case they need to retreat?" Feeney asked in a crowd that roared with laughter.

The Air Force has \$43 billion to buy 276 Raptors, but it needs 381.

"The taxpayers are paying for this," said Greg Caires, spokesman for Lockheed Martin. "We feel an obligation to explain to people what they are getting for their money."

That starts with Congressmen like Feeney, who will have to vote on funding.

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Earlier in the day, he talked with employees at Aerospace Interconnect Systems, a military electronics manufacturer in Titusville, for an hour and a half about their personal concerns, such as immigration and health care.

"We were looking for an advocate in him to bring our name to the local defense contractors," vice president James Hannah said. "This is the first time a Congressman in the district has had an office in Titusville. It gives us a resource. It was a good starting point."

Feeney plans to tour Florida Tech at 11 a.m. today.

"The system is so big, eight times out of 10 people can't articulate the problem," he said. "I love getting out and talking to people."

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