

OFFICE OF SENATOR STROM THURMOND  
447 Senate Office Building  
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LOS ANGELES, CALIF., March 8 1959 -- "Development of several of the nation's most advanced weapon systems and space age programs is proceeding on schedule," Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina said today after a classified briefing at North American Aviation, Inc.

After the briefing, a group of eight United States Senators, of which Senator Thurmond was a member, looked at mock ups of the U. S. Air Force B-70 bomber and F-108 manned interceptor, the X-15 research aircraft and the highly advanced GAM-77 air to surface missile developed by NAA.

The B-70 and the F-108 are being developed to answer the Air Force's need for both manned weapon systems and missiles, a mixed-force concept to give the nation a completely balanced offensive and defensive posture.

"The USAF B-70 is under development for the Strategic Air Command," Senator Thurmond said. "It will be capable of cruising at more than 2,000 miles per hour with inter-continental range and will be one of the nation's chief manned deterrent weapon in the 1960's.

Designed to launch an atomic missile 1,000 miles from its base, and capable of landing on its own field a half hour later, the F-108 is under development for the Air Defense Command.

Several contracts for development of sub-systems for the B-70 and F-108 have been awarded and more are expected to be

announced soon. These contracts, awarded after extensive evaluation and spirited competition among the nation's most experienced and capable contractors, eventually will spread work among 18,000 to 22,000 suppliers, both large and small, in all parts of the nation.

Now being readied for its first captive flight, expected soon, the X-15 will carry man higher and faster than he's ever been before.

A joint research program of the Air Force, Navy and National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the X-15 program was initiated in 1952. North American was given the go ahead to manufacture three research vehicles in 1955, and actual construction began in September, 1957. The first X-15 was delivered to flight test in October, 1958.

Known as "Hound Dog", the GAM-77 will be carried by the Strategic Air Command's B-52 bomber. Supersonic in speed, the missile carries a nuclear warhead and has a range of several hundred miles. Initial delivery to operational units of SAC is scheduled for 1960. This airborne missile will not only increase the effectiveness of the B-52 bomber, but will add significantly to its useful operational life.

"I cannot discuss the classified portions of the briefings received," Senator Thurmond said. "But, this visit has convinced me the Air Force and North American Aviation are on schedule in producing advanced defense weapon systems, and that these systems are being produced in an efficient manner and to be operationally available in good time. I am also convinced that these new weapons

will provide a positive contribution to the continued maintenance of the strong deterrent capability which the Air Force has so capably provided through the past ten to twelve years."

Senator Thurmond is a member of the Armed Services Committee which deals with weapons of all types in all the Service branches.