

Senator tries to sell Army on Vancouver firm's armor

Washington's Maria Cantwell says Armor Systems' peel-and-stick defense technology could save more soldiers' lives

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VANCOUVER -- If the secretary of the Army is satisfied with the armoring of military vehicles, he hasn't seen the products made by Armor Systems International, Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., said Thursday.

Cantwell held a news conference to boost the Vancouver company's Aztik 100 Peel & Stick Instant Armoring System, which is designed to protect occupants in Humvees and other military vehicles from attack. Her appearance precedes a Senate vote next week on a defense appropriations bill that sets aside \$611 million for Humvee armor kits.

Cantwell said the military should look at other options besides the all-steel armor kits that have been used thus far to protect military vehicles in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"There's better technology out there that could be deployed even faster," said Cantwell, referring to Armor Systems' claims of quicker installation.

Cantwell also said soldiers' lives could be saved with a more rapid deployment of the Aztik system.

But Francis Harvey, secretary of the Army, said in a wide-ranging interview published Thursday in USA Today, that "we have armored more than the requirement," and that, "we are virtually to the point where no Humvee leaves the base without (appropriate armor)."

"I'm not sure he's seen this technology," Cantwell said, when asked to respond to the Army secretary's remarks.

Armor Systems formed 21/2 years ago. The company designs the Humvee kits and other defense-oriented protection products.

Armor Systems announced in April that it had landed part of a \$34 million military contract to apply its own coating seal -- TankSkin Fuel Tank Self-Sealing System -- to fuel trucks in Iraq and Afghanistan. The product is designed to absorb a projectile, such as a bullet, then seal the hole, almost instantly.

Cantwell also shared a letter sent Thursday to Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld encouraging him to explore Armor Systems' peel-and-stick technology.

Rumsfeld faced the glare of the armor issue in December when a soldier in Kuwait asked him in a question-and-answer session why too few military vehicles have protective armor.

The Pentagon is going beyond armor packages, however, to defend soldiers against roadside bombs.

Rumsfeld recently directed the Army to start buying new electronic "jammers," which disrupt the remote control signals that insurgents use to detonate improvised explosive devices, according to a story published Thursday in Congressional Quarterly.

Cantwell's remarks, while welcomed, were a repeat for Armor Systems executives who appeared last year in Vancouver with Rep. Brian Baird, D-Wash., who also sought to bring attention to the peel-and-stick product and the hurdles of obtaining a Defense Department contract.

But both Armor Systems officials at the news conference Thursday were careful not to criticize the military procurement process.

In fact, the inventor of the company's products complimented Pentagon officials for advising Armor Systems to seek partners who already are established as military contractors.

So the company now has partners in Port Angeles, Wash., New York and South Carolina, said Jim Henry, the chief technical officer.

Armor Systems will be seeking more local allies. The company is sponsoring the first meeting of the Pacific Northwest Defense Coalition -- a group of Oregon and Southwest Washington business that want to increase their defense-related work -- on May 17 in Vancouver.

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