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By Josh Rogin

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The House's top defense appropriator has pledged to help strengthen the role of the Pentagon's comptroller in an effort to curb lobbying by the military services for their controversial programs.

President-elect Barack Obama intends to nominate Robert F. Hale to become the Pentagon's next comptroller, according to multiple sources close to the transition process, filling another top Pentagon slot with a Clinton-era defense official. As comptroller, Hale will essentially act as the chief financial officer for the Defense Department, which has the largest budget of any enterprise in the world.

Murtha, who was briefed on the Hale selection by Obama transition officials, said he wants to help raise the profile and influence of the comptroller's position to avoid intra-department conflicts.

"What I'm trying to do is empower the comptroller so we don't have guys going around him, so we can have a coordinated effort," said Murtha. "There will be better coordination this year, I can assure you of that."

The Appropriations Committee will work more directly and exclusively through the comptroller, Murtha said. Military service officials will still have their opportunity to weigh in at committee hearings.

Confusing and contradictory messages coming from various parts of the department are frustrating congressional efforts to appropriate funds, said Murtha.

"We can't have them telling us one thing one day and then telling us something else the next. We've got to get it together," he said.

