

Defense industry offers local opportunities

By ERIN BRIDGES, The Daily Transcript

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The defense industry is a bright spot in the San Diego economy with employment opportunities for businesses in many fields, and employees with or without security clearances, industry leaders said during a *Daily Transcript* roundtable on Tuesday.

Defense budgets through fiscal year 2009 already are approved, and those in the industry say they don't expect possible cuts in the 2010 budget to have a negative impact on the San Diego area.

"Even if the administration decides to make some changes in the defense structure and some of the programs, you're talking probably two to three years before you see those affects take place," said Terry Magee, vice president of Maritime Strategies and Campaigns for Lockheed Martin Information Systems and Global Services and former president of the San Diego Military Advisory Council (SDMAC). "I don't see anything but continued growth in the San Diego region."

Participants in the roundtable said two areas in which spending will continue are technology and infrastructure.

An emphasis has been placed on command, control, communications computers and intelligence (C4I) aspects of the defense industry -- an area in which many local San Diego companies thrive, said Tony Nufer, program manager for CSC and executive vice president of the National Defense Industrial Association (NDIA) local chapter.

And Michael Jones, of ProFinance Associates Inc. and president of the nonprofit organization The Security Network, said an increase in cyber security awareness within the Obama administration also bodes well for San Diego.

"I think that area in particular will be a large increase in spending and an area San Diego can shine," he said.

But established DoD contractors are not the only ones who can take advantage of the defense budget, roundtable participants said.

Commercial technology companies that fill a specific need could take this opportunity to break into defense contracting.

There also are opportunities for engineering firms, architects, construction companies and various service providers to take a piece of the defense-budget pie.

With an increase of 15,000 military personnel in the area over the course of the next two or three years, the homeporting of a third carrier and the first Littoral Combat Ships in San Diego, and the introduction of two new aircraft at the air stations, financial opportunities and economic boosts to the economy will be great.

"We're experiencing ... a tremendous increase in infrastructure growth," said Dave Guebert of Sempra Utilities and president of the Society of American Military Engineers (SAME). "Obviously all of these people moving here is going to create a tremendous amount of jobs for engineers and architects that support the Navy and Marine Corps."

Steven Geyer, principle engineer at Tetra Tech EM Inc., said he has seen movement within the commercial sector toward government contracts.

He said a push within the military to reduce and even eliminate its impact on the environment opens doors for companies specializing in green building and sustainability -- an area in which he said San Diego has a lot to offer.

Magee said he hopes local municipalities start taking advantage of opportunities to tap into defense money, something they have not yet done.

SDMAC is working to broker some discussions to accelerate military

construction projects that will benefit the local economy.

Traditional defense contractors are staying in business, but other industries can get involved, too.

"This could be the only successful example of a stimulus package," said Eric Basu, president of **Sentek Consulting**. "We have one out there, (but) this is the only one that's working."

And as Jones pointed out, many jobs traditionally filled

by military personnel are being outsourced while the nation is fighting wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Commercial companies are filling in, performing jobs such as grounds keeping and gate security.

Of course, there are challenges when it comes to working for the government. Many technical contracts require security clearances, which are not quickly obtained.

It can be hard to break into government contracting. And the contracting process itself can be daunting.

But groups such as SAME, NDIA and the Armed Forces Communications and Electronics Association, represented at the roundtable by Shirley Adams -- San Diego Chapter president and **General Dynamics** IT senior director, technical solutions -- offer a variety of programs, seminars and resources to help companies enter the government contracting world.