AIA CHIEF TOUTS US PAVILION WHILE CALLING FOR DOD NEW STARTS

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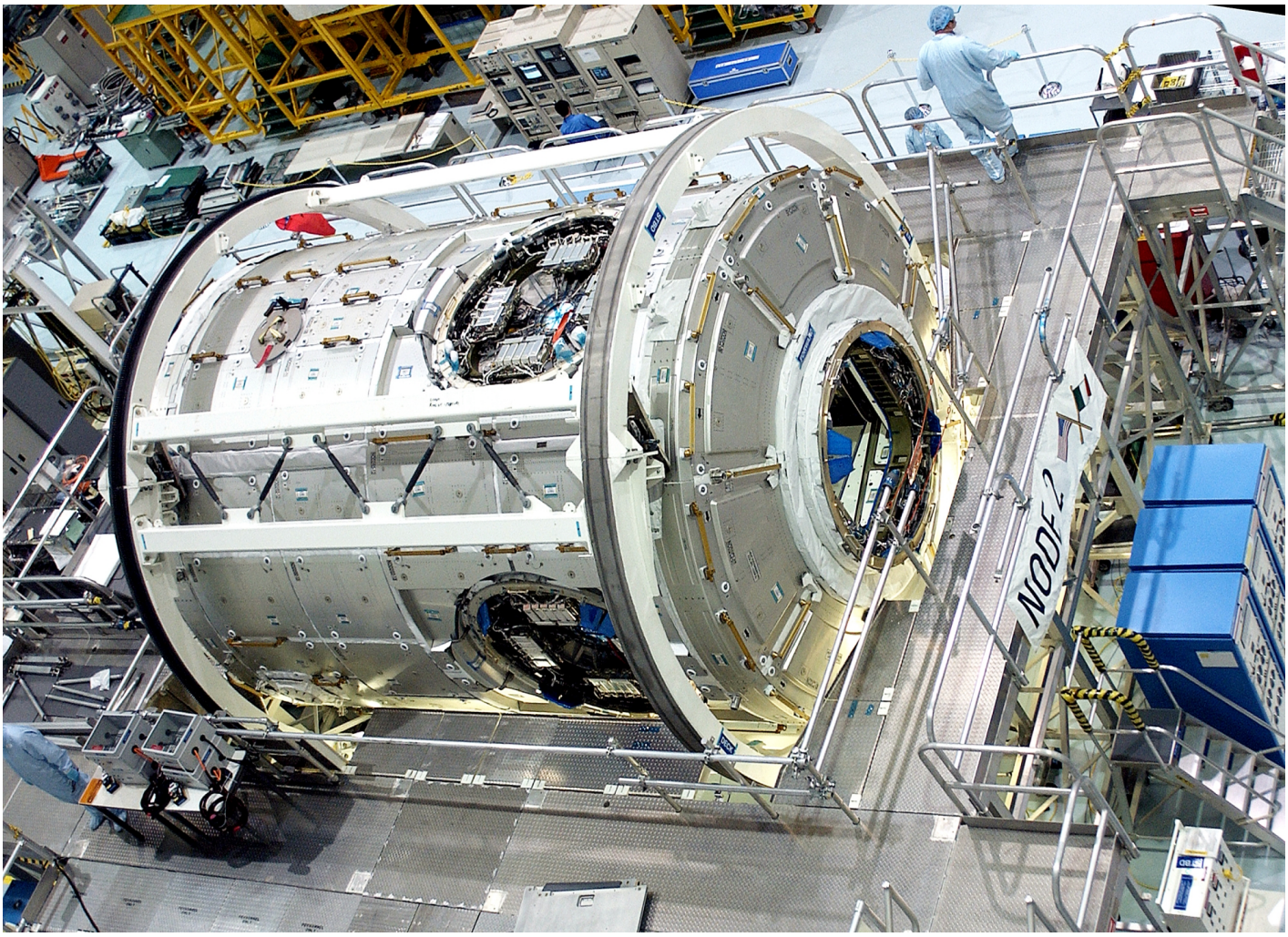

Aerospace Industries Association chief operating officer Bob Durbin is thrilled with the turnout of American aerospace firms at this year's Dubai show, with the number of exhibitors in the US pavilion almost doubling to 140 compared with the previous edition.

He says the turnout of smaller companies is particularly pleasing, as tier two and three suppliers are critical to the defence and commercial aerospace "ecosystem".

"When you think of air shows you always think of primes," he says. "It's just as important for smaller companies. These air shows are great venues where they can identify to everybody else inside the ecosystem and show how they're an integral part of that supply chain that provides all the capabilities."

AIA's membership includes more than 300 major aerospace firms, and many in the defence sector are looking outward, particularly to the Gulf region, for international sales opportunities amid

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stagnant or uncertain military spending at home.

One of challenges US firms have been grappling with in recent years is the lack of new programmes, as US services opt to upgrade and recapitalise today's equipment rather than invest in next-generation products.

"We need to get away from one-year budgets where as a result, you end up making decisions about refresh versus buying new," Durbin says. "You upgrade old, and don't make the right investments in future capabilities."

As a former US Army Lieutenant General, Durbin especially wants to see progress on the army-led Future Vertical Lift programme which aims to develop the next-generation of utility and attack rotorcraft in the light, medium and heavy-lift categories.

"After 10 years of recap and refresh, we can't go another 10 years," he says. "Right now, there is an extensive amount of research and development [spending] being absorbed by the industry for the [Department of Defense], and at some point there has to be some return on that investment."

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