

*The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Defense Subcommittee
United States Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-128, the Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510*

*The Honorable Richard Durbin
Ranking Member
Defense Subcommittee
United States Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-128, the Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510*

Dear Chairman Cochran and Ranking Member Durbin:

We write to make you aware of a funding issue that would arise for the Carrier Replacement Program should a continuing resolution (CR) be required through March. Funding for the Carrier Replacement Program at FY16 levels would trigger costly schedule delays and have a negative impact on our Navy's operational capability.

As you know, the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier fleet is already stretched thin, and as a result, the Navy has required a waiver to have one fewer operational carrier than the 11 required by Congress. The current fleet of ten nuclear-powered aircraft carriers is being utilized at unprecedented rates because of a complex security environment and a delayed procurement of additional ships. This over-utilization is resulting in extended deployments, deferred maintenance, reduced operational availability, increased ownership costs and potentially shortened life spans for these strategic assets. Ensuring stable and adequate funding for the Carrier Replacement Program is one of the foremost steps Congress can take to allay the risks associated with the current shortfall in available aircraft carriers.

As you are aware, the Fiscal Year 2017 President's Budget requested, and your Committee recommended, \$1.37 billion for the Carrier Replacement Program to ensure the timely procurement of long-lead items required for planned cost and delivery schedules. These schedules were developed in accordance with operational demands. The FY17 budget request is roughly \$500 million more than the FY16 appropriation for the Carrier Replacement Program. A CR at FY16 levels will force delays that will increase the cost of the program and delay the already-strained schedule. There are critical orders that must be made before the third quarter of FY17 to support the advanced steel fabrication required to maintain delivery timelines for equipment like shaft forgings, propulsion machinery, major pumps, and large complex valves. If FY17 level funding is not executed until the third quarter of FY17, the program cost and schedule will be at significant risk.

Because of the harmful effects a CR would have to the Carrier Replacement Program, including increased costs, schedule delays and potentially degraded operational capability, we request special consideration in any potential continuing resolution reflecting the President's FY17 budget request for CVN 80. We appreciate any consideration the Committee can give to keeping the Carrier Replacement Program on track and helping to preserve one of our nation's most vital national security assets.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

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