

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 16th, 2018

The Honorable James N. Mattis
Secretary of Defense
The United States Department of Defense
1000 Defense, Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Mattis,

As you complete the Fiscal Year 2020 budget build, we write to strongly urge your support for the F-35 Lightning II Program. As our nation's only 5th generation stealth fighter being built today, investing in the production ramp rate, readiness, and modernization are critical to ensuring the U.S. maintains air superiority. Further, these investments would allow the Department and our allies to continue driving down the cost by leveraging economies of scale.

It is concerning that over the last few years the Department has solely relied on Congress to support an incremental production ramp and invest in additional spares and tooling. This path is troubling as it undermines the collective commitment to a more cutting-edge joint force. In an era of increasing threats, we simply cannot afford to continue to make additional investments in less capable and older 4th generation legacy fighters that will simply not be able to counter the rapidly advancing capabilities of our adversaries over the next 20 years. The F-35 is the most affordable, lethal, and survivable air dominance fighter, and it is of the utmost importance that we focus efforts to reach full rate production and invest in the capacity of the F-35 industrial base, which will prove to be a more cost and readiness effective approach.

Now is the time to increase our investment in this program, not only in production but also in sustainment and modernization. In order to keep this program on track, the Department must continue increasing production, year-over-year, and the Air Force needs to get to at least 60 F-35As per year in the Fiscal Year 2020 budget request. This is critical to enabling the Air Force to reach 80 F-35As per year in the needed timeframe and for the military to have the force structure needed to meet the coming threat environment in 2025 and beyond.

The Department should also adequately fund sustainment, including spare parts and repairability, and modernization (C2D2) to ensure the necessary readiness rates. All told, Congress has added \$330 million in spares funding the past two years, and we need to be doing even more to hit the desired 80% Mission Capable rate you require for the fleet. The Department needs to put the proper resources behind this requirement to sustain readiness levels.

Congressional intent on this program could not be more clear. In Fiscal Year 2018, Congress funded 90 F-35s, +20 jets above the Administration's request. In Fiscal Year 2019, Congress funded 93 F-35s, +16 above the request. In fact, Congress has had to increase production for 5 budget cycles in a row now (+58 aircraft). We urge the Department to propose an increased rate above 93 aircraft when the FY2020

budget request comes to us in February. We also believe the Department should finally request the required spares and modernization funding for this program. We can and should invest in both.

In addition, we would like to invite the Department to meet with the Congressional Joint Strike Fighter Caucus in January and provide an F-35 program update. The program enjoys tremendous bipartisan support and we hope to hold such updates on a steady basis moving forward.

Thank you for your steady leadership during these critical times, and for your attention to these matters. We look forward to hearing back from you at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,



John B. Larson
Member of Congress
Co-Chair, Congressional F-35 Caucus



Thomas J. Rooney
Member of Congress
Co-Chair, Congressional F-35 Caucus

CC:

The Honorable Patrick M. Shanahan, Deputy Secretary of Defense

The Honorable Ellen M. Lord, Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment (A&S)