

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

December 21, 2023

The Honorable Lloyd Austin
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Austin:

As you continue preparation of the fiscal year 2025 Budget Request for the Department of Defense, we are writing to express our support for the procurement of *Gerald R. Ford*-class aircraft carriers on steady and predictable construction intervals.

The President's Budget Request for Fiscal Year 2024 forecasts two years of advance procurement (AP) for CVN 82, the fifth ship in the Ford-class of nuclear-powered aircraft carriers in fiscal years 2026 and 2027 with incremental funding beginning in fiscal year 2028. This procurement timeline for CVN 82 is consistent with the Navy's most recent 30-year shipbuilding plan, which acknowledges the importance of stable, executable acquisition profiles to the development and retention of highly-skilled workforces and investment in world-class manufacturing and shipbuilding facilities.

It is disheartening, therefore, to see recent reports suggesting that the Department may be considering delays to CVN 82 in the fiscal year 2025 budget request – something that would be extremely disruptive to the shipbuilding industrial base and detrimental to national security.

In accordance with Section 132 of the James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023 (P.L. 117-263), the Secretary of the Navy recently submitted a report to the congressional defense committees highlighting the overwhelming benefits of a Ford-class acquisition strategy that leverages the block buy purchase of CVN 82 and CVN 83 with sufficient advance procurement funding on consistent and predictable 4-year construction intervals. Similar to previous multi-ship procurement strategies that have proven successful across numerous shipbuilding programs (to include CVN 80 and CVN 81), it is estimated that a block buy procurement of CVN 82 and CVN 83 in FY28 would save the nation more than \$5 billion and inject much needed stability into an otherwise fragile shipbuilding industry.

As recent events have shown, our nation's aircraft carrier fleet remains in constant demand, with more than 1/3 (4 of 11) of the nation's aircraft carriers recently deployed worldwide to protect vital national interests. Foundational to this deterrent presence is our nation's aircraft carrier industrial base, which has been dramatically reduced to approximately 2,000 across the country. These remaining suppliers – many of which support both submarines and aircraft carriers as part of the nation's nuclear industrial base – rely on the Navy's commitment to steady, executable procurement timelines to avoid the "boom and bust" acquisition profiles and breaks in production lines referenced in the 2024 shipbuilding plan.

As such, we urge the Department to remain on course with the procurement of CVN 82 in 2028 and strongly encourage consideration of the optimum acquisition strategy for Ford-class aircraft carriers delineated in the Navy's report to the defense committees earlier this year.

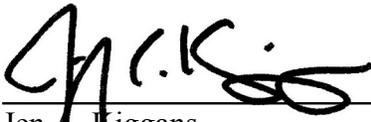
Sincerely,



Robert J. Wittman
Member of Congress



Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Member of Congress



Jen A. Kiggans
Member of Congress



Jennifer L. McClellan
Member of Congress