

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 16, 2008

The Honorable Robert M. Gates
Secretary of Defense
The Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Our Navy's aircraft carriers have long been integral to America's global engagement, serving as a pillar of our nation's forward presence and helping to protect and promote our national interests around the world. Former Presidents have concluded that when word of a crisis breaks out in Washington, it is no accident that the first question asked is 'Where's the nearest carrier?'

We are concerned by reports of a significant shortfall in the number of strike-fighter aircraft that are the very reason for existence of our Nation's aircraft carriers. The Chief of Naval Operations spoke to the looming strike-fighter shortfall in congressional testimony earlier this year, stating that shortfall for the Navy and Marine Corps would be in excess of 125 aircraft even if they were able to extend the older Hornets' to 10,000 hours of flight time. This could be an expensive and problematic proposition at best. Additionally, other groups such as the Congressional Research Service have also documented the problem, and continuing Navy analysis since the CNO's testimony indicates a shortfall that, if left unaddressed, could render hollow a major portion of our aircraft carrier fleet.

The role played by our aircraft carriers in protecting and promoting America's interests around the world is too important to permit this to occur.

Therefore, as the Defense Department continues its preparation of the fiscal year 2010 budget, we are writing to express our strong support for the continued procurement of F/A-18E/F Super Hornets as the most cost-effective near-term means to address the Navy's strike-fighter shortfall. Given the F/A-18E/F's history of on-time and on-budget deliveries, and the \$1.7 billion in savings generated to date by the use of multi-year contracting, we also request that the Department use of a third multi-year procurement contract as the most cost-effective method by which to address the strike-fighter shortfall.

We appreciate your consideration of our views.

Most Sincerely,



Russ Carnahan
Member of Congress



W. Todd Akin
Member of Congress



Robert Brady
Member of Congress



Frank A. LoBiondo
Member of Congress



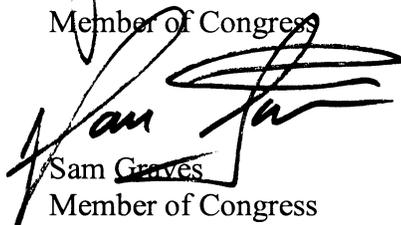
Joe Wilson
Member of Congress



Norman D. Dicks
Member of Congress



Gabrielle Giffords
Member of Congress



Sam Graves
Member of Congress



Walter B. Jones
Member of Congress



Dan Boren
Member of Congress



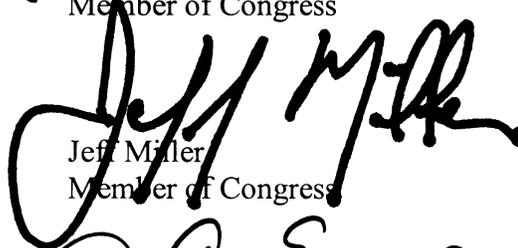
J. Randy Forbes
Member of Congress



Robert J. Wittman
Member of Congress



Robin Hayes
Member of Congress



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Jo Ann Emerson
Member of Congress



Wm. Lacy Clay
Member of Congress



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Kirsten E. Gillibrand
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Howard P. "Buck" McKeon
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Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Member of Congress



Carol Shea-Porter
Member of Congress



Steven R. Rothman
Member of Congress