

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 16, 2016

The Honorable Mac Thornberry
Chairman
House Armed Services Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
House Armed Services Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable J. Randy Forbes
Chairman
House Armed Services Committee
Seapower & Projection Forces Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Joe Courtney
Ranking Member
House Armed Services Committee
Seapower & Projection Forces Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Thornberry and Forbes and Ranking Members Smith and Courtney:

As you begin to finalize the Fiscal Year 2017 (FY17) National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), we write to express our strong support for funding the Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) at a production rate of three vessels for FY17 and a recommitment to the U.S. Navy's strategic plan of 52 total Small Surface Combatants.

The President's FY17 Defense Budget was advertised as a plan for taking the long view in investing for the future. Unfortunately, in the case of the Navy's Small Surface Combatant Program, the budget falls short and the plan is strategically flawed. This budget request abruptly reduces the procurement of LCS in FY17 from 3 to 2 and drastically reduces the total number from 52 to 40 over the life of the program.

This budget proposal comes from a President and Secretary of Defense who have less than a year remaining in office. It defies logic to make significant changes to a program that was thoroughly evaluated and studied less than two years ago. In fact, the Small Surface Combatant Task Force, which issued their findings in late 2014, reaffirmed the need for 52 LCS and outlined a clear path forward for the program.

Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus and Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development and Acquisition Sean Stackley have both recently testified before the House Armed Services Committee that 52 Small Surface Combatants are required to fulfill the Navy's missions around the globe and meet the requirements stated in the Navy's Fiscal Year 2014 Force Structure Assessment Study. The LCS and the modified LCS Frigate are the only options for the affordable and expeditious replacement of the 77 ships that have been decommissioned or are on the verge of retirement to conduct these missions. Such cuts to the LCS program will hinder the Navy's ability to respond to threats around the globe and meet their stated goal of a 308 ship fleet.

The Secretary of Defense has provided no analysis for this proposed change, and has failed to submit the updated Long-Range Plan for the Construction of Naval Vessels for FY17 despite a statutory obligation to do so. In other words, this budget proposal reverses years of analysis and studies regarding the future of the LCS program by the Department of Defense and the Navy without any known conclusions regarding the long-term impact this decision would have on the overall fleet.

The proposed down select to a single supplier would also have significant impacts to the industrial base. Assistant Secretary Stackley recently testified that the DOD downsized FY17 ship acquisition plan will likely result in one of the two LCS shipyards going out of business and ultimately increasing the cost per ship in out years. Currently both LCS shipyards, one each on the Gulf Coast and the Great Lakes, are performing well with a combined workforce of over 6,000 employees and a supply base of 1,500 companies spread across 42 states.

The fixed price contract negotiated in Fiscal Year 2010 has yielded significant cost savings to the program and preserves the outstanding learning and efficiency curves at both of the LCS shipyards. The LCS is the rare military program that has seen costs decrease instead of increase over time. The LCS has adhered to stringent contractual and budgetary constraints and is locked into fixed price contracts and a congressionally mandated cost cap. Littoral Combat Ships are being built today at an average cost of \$350 million per hull, well under the cost cap and at half the cost of the first ships of class. According to the Navy, the LCS is the most affordable ship in its fleet.

A large portion of these production efficiencies and cost savings are attributable to significant private investments. These private investments were made based on the government's commitment of 52 ships. Backing away from this commitment acts as a disincentive to future private investment and would likely come at an additional cost to the U.S. taxpayer.

The LCS continues to fill a strategic role for the Navy. Recently, in testimony before the Armed Service Committee, PACOM Commander Admiral Harry Harris made it a point to stress the importance of the LCS in his region as a "terrific platform to work with our allies and partners in the region." Commander of Naval Surface Forces Vice Admiral Rowden sums it up best: "More ships with more firepower acting more independently will increase the planning complexity and resourcing of our potential challengers." We in Congress should listen to those who are tasked with managing these programs, those who know them best and use them daily. They are clear that we need more of these ships, not less.

We urge you to reject this short-sighted proposal and authorize funding for three Littoral Combat Ships in the FY17 NDAA. This will ensure the Navy will be on track for its required surface combatant fleet, set a course for stability in the shipbuilding industrial base, and assure the level of production necessary for maintaining affordability to the taxpayer. We appreciate your consideration of this request and we stand ready to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



Bradley Byrne
Member of Congress



Reid J. Ribble
Member of Congress



Rod Blum
Member of Congress



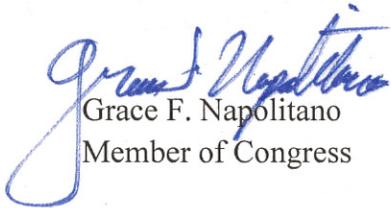
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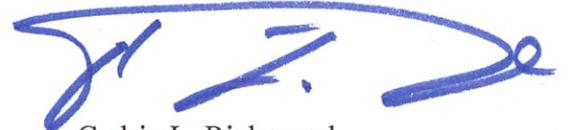
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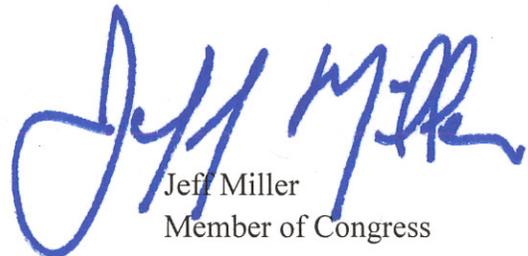
Austin Scott
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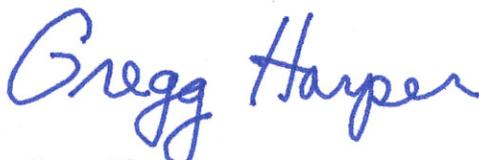
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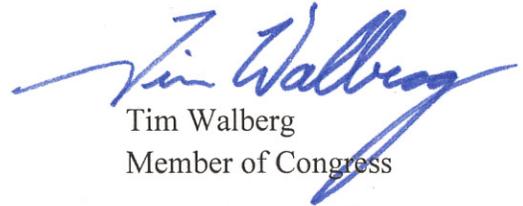
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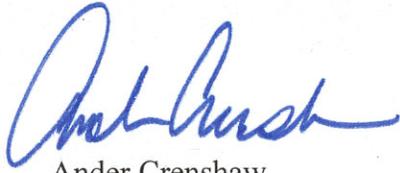
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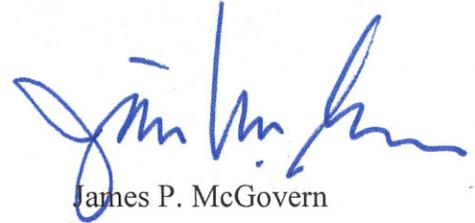
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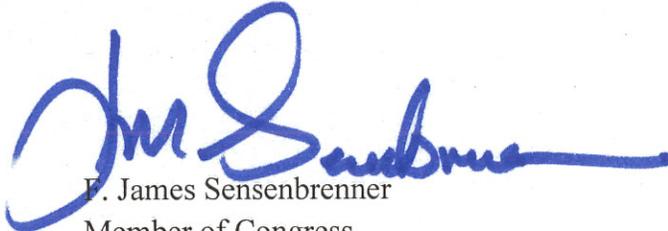
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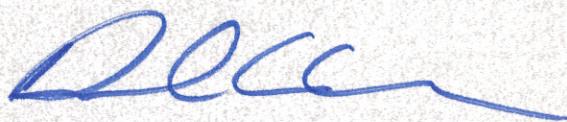
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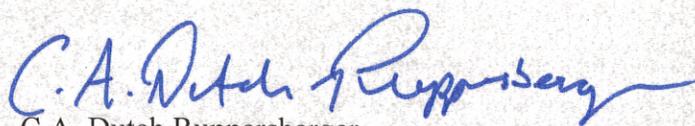
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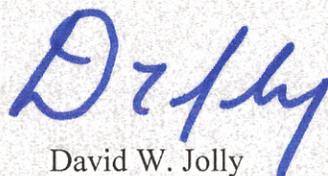
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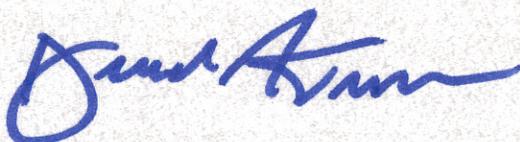
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