

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 14, 2017

The Honorable James Mattis
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Mattis,

As you continue preparation of the Fiscal Year 2019 Budget Request for the Department of Defense, we write to express our support for the block buy of *Gerald R. Ford*-class aircraft carriers. It is our understanding that the Navy and industry have been evaluating the feasibility of block-buy for CVN-80 and CVN-81, as well as the potential cost savings from such a procurement strategy. We applaud the Department of Defense's efforts to examine smarter and more efficient acquisition approaches and would actively support the Department's pursuit of a block buy of Ford-class aircraft carriers in Fiscal Year 2019.

Previous block-buys have yielded savings of several percent of the total cost of the ships when compared to annual procurements, which could be in excess of \$1 billion for two Ford-class carriers. Total savings could grow to something closer to \$2 billion if the procurement intervals between the ships are additionally shortened from five-year centers to three- or four-year centers, which would be consistent with the Navy's goal of achieving and maintaining the 12-carrier force called for in the Navy's 355-ship requirement.

In light of the increased budgetary demands placed on the Department, we believe that revisiting a proven acquisition method, one that could be executed without reducing funding for other vital shipbuilding programs, is not only warranted, but a sound investment.

As recent events in the Pacific have shown, our nation's carrier fleet is under considerable demand, with 3 of 11 deployed and 7 of 11 carriers underway in recent weeks. A block-buy of Ford-class will help the Navy achieve its objective of 12 carriers that better meets combatant commander requirements and readiness goals to sustain worldwide operations. Additionally, a block-buy would continue to signal to the shipbuilding industrial base about our nation's resolve to field a 355 ship fleet. Over the past 25 years, our shipbuilding industrial base has undergone a massive consolidation. The community, which used to tap into more than 17,000 suppliers now relies on fewer than 3,000 across the country. These remaining suppliers would significantly benefit from the predictability and stability of a known future workload. We believe the stability offered by a block-buy approach would enable suppliers to develop greater efficiencies and invest in their own businesses which would further benefit other Navy shipbuilding programs as well.

At the forefront of today's Navy is the Nimitz class carrier and Virginia-class submarine, both of which are successful products of block-buy type initiatives. As we look to the next 50 years, we believe a wise investment of our precious defense dollars would be in the time-proven acquisition method of block-buy for our next generation of aircraft carrier. Thank you for your consideration and service to our country.

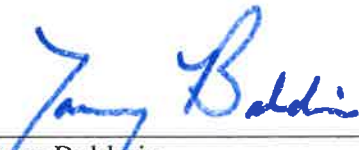
Sincerely,



Roger F. Wicker
U.S. Senator



Tim Kaine
U.S. Senator



Tammy Baldwin
U.S. Senator



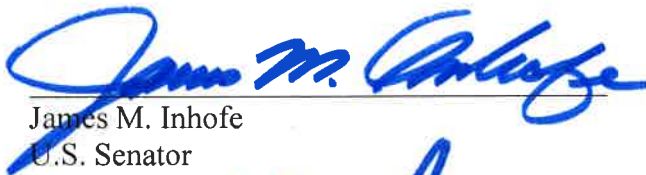
Tom Cotton
U.S. Senator



Cory Gardner
U.S. Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
U.S. Senator



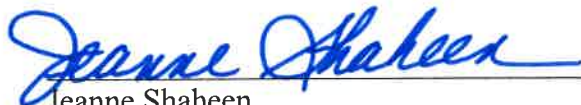
James M. Inhofe
U.S. Senator



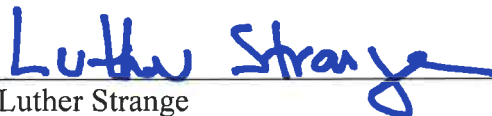
Bill Nelson
U.S. Senator



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
U.S. Senator



Luther Strange
U.S. Senator



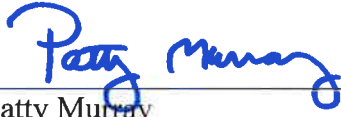
Mark R. Warner
U.S. Senator



Sherod Brown
U.S. Senator



Thom Tillis
U.S. Senator



Patty Murray
U.S. Senator



Maria Cantwell
U.S. Senator



Tim Scott
U.S. Senator