

Congressman Mike Gallagher (WI-08)

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Madame Chairwoman and distinguished colleagues, as a Marine Corps veteran and member of the House Armed Services Seapower and Projection Forces Subcommittee, I look forward to working with you to fulfill our first and foremost responsibility of keeping the country safe.

To do that we need to project power throughout the world, which depends in large part on our willingness here in Congress to provide and maintain a robust naval fleet, as duty dictates according to Article 1, Section 8, Clause 13 of the Constitution. Thanks to the mindless defense sequestration, however, we have been derelict in that duty and as a result the Navy is the smallest it's been in 99 years, currently satisfying only 40% of the demand from regional commanders.

We now have an opportunity to turn that all around. We now have an opportunity to answer the Navy's own call for a 355-ship fleet. In support of this effort, it is my honor as a Member of Congress to represent the highly skilled American workers who build the Freedom-class Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) at Fincantieri Marinette Marine, in the 8th District of the great State of Wisconsin.

Marinette Marine has grown from humble beginnings in 1942 with a contract to build five wooden barges, to a world-class shipbuilder who has brought naval shipbuilding back to the Great Lakes to a level not seen since the Emergency Shipbuilding Program of World War II.

Every day, 2,200 workers pass through the shipyard's gates, don their hard hats, and go to work building American warships that allow the Navy to conduct critical missions such as

antisubmarine warfare, mine countermeasures, ISR, and surface warfare. The construction of these ships in turn provides much needed local high-skill, high-pay jobs for the shipyard and over 200 contributing sub-component producers. Continuing down the path of mindless sequester, or even embarking on a decades-long development of a new small surface combatant, would result in the loss of some of the most highly skilled workers in the world. Reconstituting this workforce would be tremendously difficult if not impossible.

My point is not parochial, it is simply this: when we talk about our defense industrial base, this is what we mean. Behind such buzzwords lie real people; patriotic Americans who take pride in working hard and giving our warfighters what they need to keep us safe. Our shipbuilding program thus lies at the intersection of our national security and our economic security.

With that in mind, Madame Chairwoman, I applaud the inclusion of three LCS in your FY17 Defense Appropriations bill, and ask you to continue your efforts to return to, or plus up the Navy's 52-ship program of record in your FY18 budget submission. This will be pivotal as the Navy transitions its small surface combatant from LCS to a multi-mission frigate. The Navy's Small Surface Combatant Task Force concluded that building a frigate on a modified LCS hull offers the best path to affordably deliver distributed lethality to the fleet in a reasonable time frame.

At a broader level I respectfully remind the Committee that the 52-ship requirement represents the bare minimum needed to meet naval requirements for projection of force. This 52-ship requirement was validated by the Chief of Naval Operations several months ago in his Force

Structure Assessment. The Acting Secretary of the Navy Sean Stackley, has testified that then Secretary of Defense Carter's 2015 plan to truncate the program to 40 ships, was and is, a result solely of the budgetary decisions made by the previous Administration. The previous Administration recklessly held the defense of our nation hostage to its domestic political agenda. The previous Administration offered us a false choice between posture and presence.

We must reject this choice and provide the Navy what it needs to get the job done.

And so on behalf of the dedicated workers in Northeast Wisconsin I thank you for your support. Today those workers will walk through the gate in Marinette to build some of the best ships in our Navy, constantly improving their craft to deliver a better product for less money, to give our warfighters what they need to keep us safe. They are doing their jobs and so we must do ours.