

FY26 Defense Appropriations Member Day Hearing
Testimony remarks for Rep. Jen Kiggans

Chairman Calvert, Ranking Member McCollum, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for holding this Member Day and for the opportunity for off-committee members to speak to our priorities in this space.

As a Navy veteran who represents one of the most military-heavy districts in the entire country, investing in and improving our military has, and always will be, one of my top priorities. I fought hard to secure several wins in last year's NDAA that will directly benefit our servicemembers and their families. These provisions will help improve our servicemembers' quality of life, increase access to mental healthcare, explore improvements to our nation's ship building and repair capacity, and much more. But there's still much more work to be done. We must build on our priorities from FY25, which include prioritizing the fight against China, promoting innovation and modernization, supporting our servicemembers and their families, growing our defense industrial workforce, reinventing the DoD's process for procuring and acquiring technology, and working closely with our allies and partners to build our military arsenal.

My focus is on three critical priorities that directly impact our national security and the well-being of our servicemembers and their families. The first is ensuring we continue to invest in our undersea deterrence capabilities by building two Virginia-class submarines and one Columbia-class submarine per year. The second, is ensuring that we continue to invest in Navy F-35s so that we have maximum carrier-based superiority available on both coasts. The third, is continuing to make meaningful investments to the quality of life for those who wear the uniform and their families.

Investing in Our Submarine Fleet for National Security

As threats from adversaries like China and Russia continue to grow, the need for a robust, modernized undersea force has never been greater. Our submarine fleet gives the United States a decisive advantage—ensuring our ability to project power, deter aggression, and, if necessary, respond with overwhelming force.

The Virginia-class attack submarine program has been a cornerstone of our naval dominance. These fast, stealthy, and highly capable submarines play an essential role in intelligence gathering, special operations support, and maintaining control of the maritime battlespace.

Consistently funding two Virginia-class submarines per year is not just a matter of shipbuilding efficiency—it is a strategic necessity.

Additionally, **consistent funding is essential to promoting the long-term health of the domestic shipbuilding industrial base and the workforce on which it relies.** This industry cannot thrive as a feast-or-famine endeavor. A clear market signal of stable, two-per-year funding is absolutely vital to maintain and grow the highly skilled workforce required for

submarine production and to promote the industry partnerships necessary for efficiency and success. Without predictability, we risk losing critical talent and manufacturing capability—weakening both our national security and economic stability.

Similarly, the **Columbia-class ballistic missile submarine** is the most critical leg of our nuclear triad, ensuring a survivable and effective deterrent. We cannot afford any disruption in this program. These submarines are set to replace the aging Ohio-class fleet, and any funding instability will jeopardize our ability to maintain continuous at-sea deterrence. The Columbia-class is not just a shipbuilding program—it is the backbone of our nation’s nuclear security.

Investing in F-35 Aircraft and Strategic Basing

In addition to undersea capabilities, we must also focus on modernizing our air forces. One critical component of this modernization is the F-35 aircraft, which is used by many of our allied partners. However, all Navy F-35s are currently based on the West Coast, which limits our ability to rapidly deploy and respond to threats to our Atlantic Fleet. We must increase the number of F-35s in our Navy and invest in placing these aircraft at our East Coast master jet base to enhance our operational flexibility and readiness. The F-35 carrier-based design enables it to operate from both conventional aircraft carriers and land bases, providing unparalleled operational flexibility, mobile air power, and the ability to be forward-deployed anywhere.

Basing additional F-35s on the East Coast will also strengthen our interoperability with NATO allies and improve our strategic positioning in the face of rising threats from both China and Russia. The F-35 is critical to our future combat capabilities, and ensuring it is properly distributed across key locations in the U.S., available to respond to Pacific and Atlantic threats, is an investment that will pay significant dividends in our national defense.

Investing in Quality of Life for Our Servicemembers

Our military remains the strongest in the world not only because of our advanced technology and world-class weaponry, but because of the brave men and women who serve our country. We ask so much of them and their families, and we have a duty to ensure they are supported—both on and off the battlefield.

I’m incredibly proud to have secured 29 wins in last year’s NDAA that will directly benefit the servicemembers and military families in Hampton Roads, across the country, and around the world. We must continue this momentum, with our focus on key areas to include:

- Housing
- Pay and compensation
- Healthcare
- Education
- Spouse Support
- Childcare

At a time when our great nation is facing threats from every corner of the globe, Congress and the Department of Defense must keep its focus on our servicemembers and their families, because they are our nation's asymmetric advantage against our adversaries.

As a third-generation veteran, military spouse, and mother to children who serve, I will always be the loudest voice for our military men and women in Congress! The decisions we make here today will shape the future of our military for decades to come. Investing in **our submarine fleet** ensures we maintain our strategic advantage. Expanding the F-35 fleet and basing additional aircraft on the East Coast strengthens our air dominance, enhances operational flexibility, and improves our interoperability with allies. Investing in **our servicemembers' quality of life** ensures we maintain the world's most professional and capable fighting force. Mr. Chairman, thank you again for the opportunity to discuss the defense priorities in my district and throughout the Department of Defense. The United States has the greatest military in the world, and it is the honor of my lifetime to represent our servicemembers in Congress.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.