

Congressman John Rutherford (FL-04)
House Appropriations Committee – Subcommittee on Military Construction
April 17, 2018

Chairman Dent, Ranking Member Wasserman Schultz, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of my priorities for the Fiscal Year 2019 Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill.

First, as a Member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, I would like to thank you all for your work to ensure veterans receive the best care possible. The 115th Congress has made great strides in increasing access to quality care, improving accountability, and reforming many broken systems at the VA. These reforms are a testament to our two Committees effectively working together, and I look forward to continuing this important progress.

However, I would like to use this time today to focus on two projects of high importance to Naval Station Mayport, which I am proud to represent in Congress.

The mission of Naval Station Mayport is to sustain and enhance warfighter readiness and is the third largest fleet concentration area in the United States. While serving as the home to an Amphibious Ready Group, several Destroyers, Cruisers, and other ships, Mayport is also the proud east coast homeport for the Littoral Combat Ship *Freedom* class. The USS *Milwaukee*, USS *Detroit*, and the USS *Little Rock* have already been delivered to the Navy and homeported at Mayport. As Congress has strongly supported the LCS program, eventually a total of up to 14 LCS will homeported at Mayport by 2022.

As the LCS continues to be delivered to the fleet, it is vital that required military construction projects are funded by this Congress. That is why the President's FY2019 Budget Request includes funding for the LCS Support Facility and the LCS Operational Training Facility at Mayport. These projects are the second phase of MILCON that is essential to the training and equipping of the LCS squadrons as this class of ship begins to enter its active deployments in the next few years.

Before I discuss why these projects are so important to fund in this coming fiscal year, I want to explain what makes the LCS different than other surface

combatants. The LCS training and manning plans are designed to maximize efficiency of deployed ships, transferring traditional training and administrative functions to shore facilities. The Blue-Gold crew swapping and ashore facilities allow for tactical and financial efficiencies. Without these capabilities, the Navy would require larger crews, diminishing the tactical advantages of the LCS in close, contested waters. As we see the threats across the globe on the rise, having this capability will prove essential in the years to come.

The two projects requested by the President in FY2019 will accommodate the LCS Squadron Command staff, classrooms, systems trainers, operation watch floor, and other space critical for the LCS mission. It will also provide a multi-story parking garage, which has been a need at Mayport for years, especially as it continues to expand in the coming years, and will convert other portions of the base to support the LCS mission.

The Navy has clearly stated the need for these projects to be completed quickly and included them on the Unfunded Priorities List for FY2018. The LCS Concept of Operations requires these facilities to be in place two years in advance of ship arrival in order to meet training and support requirements. The first phase of these buildings were funded in FY2015 and later constructed; however, due to the delay in funding for phase two, crews have been training in temporary structures at Mayport and out at Naval Base San Diego, the west coast LCS homeport. This leads to inadequate training for the crews and is, in the Navy's own words, "unsustainable". The Navy also stated that without these structures, "both the Squadron and the ship crews cannot be adequately supported by existing shore facilities due primarily to over-crowding which will severely impact CONOPS and mission capability."

As we have seen with the recent ship collisions in the Pacific Fleet, funding and supporting adequate training for our sailors is often a matter of life or death. The Navy is in many ways leading the services in how they look at training. This includes the immersive virtual shipboard environment lab training systems that they use for the LCS crews. Congress has supported this game-based training strategy, which is already proving to save training hours and can be done ashore instead of on the ship. I believe that this model has the potential to reshape how training is carried out across the fleet, which is why funding these facilities is so important. We owe it to the LCS crews, the Squadron leadership, and to all of our

sailors to ensure these training and support facilities are in place before we ask them to carry out their mission. Inadequate structures and temporary workarounds for a growing program only weakens our security.

Again, thank you all for this opportunity and time to speak today. I also say thank you on behalf of a grateful nation for all the hard work you do in ensuring our nation remains the strongest and safest in the world. I am always available for further discussion on these or other programs of interest. I yield back.