

May 13, 2025

Congressman Mike Rogers
Chairman
House Armed Services Committee
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Congressman Adam Smith
Ranking Member
House Armed Services Committee
2264 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: FY2026 LA-02 NDAA Requests

Dear Chairman Rogers and Ranking Member Smith:

Thank you for considering these requests for the Fiscal Year 2026 National Defense Authorization (NDAA) bill. This letter highlights my requests and the importance of these projects for our national defense.

1. Report Language for F-15EX Fielding to Air National Guard Air Control Units

The below proposed report language would direct the Air Force to prioritize the fielding of the F-15EX to Air National Guard installations with air control and sovereignty missions over the fielding and permanent stationing of such aircraft to overseas locations. The language would prioritize Air National Guard installations like the 159th Fighter Wing at Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base New Orleans. The 159th FW has already been selected to receive the F-15EX, the newest version of the F-15. Unfortunately, despite its homeland defense mission, the unit will not receive these aircraft until late 2027. This may be too late for the F-15Cs which cannot be sustained or replaced at this point - they can only be retired and replaced. There is a significant risk the unit will lose, not only current F-15C/D aircraft to obsolescence, but pilots and maintenance personnel who will be forced to leave to find aircraft to fly and maintain.

Meanwhile, the USAF is sending two new squadrons of F-15EX aircraft to Kadena, Japan, before the jets can recapitalize Louisiana or other air sovereignty sites in the United States. The Department is embarking on a large Golden Dome project for missile defense - a program that will take considerable time. Today, the F-15s in Louisiana already perform a critical homeland defense mission. That mission deserves priority over sending aircraft overseas. It is time to prioritize the fielding of these new aircraft to Homeland over international location.

Draft Language:

The Committee remains concerned that F-15C/D aircraft assigned to Air National Guard units with air control and sovereignty responsibilities are well past their planned lifespan and urgently need to be replaced. While each of these units has been selected by the Air Force to receive either the newer F-15EX or the F-35A, timelines to replace the current aircraft are strained and could result in the units losing some or all of their aircraft due to obsolescence before the new aircraft arrive, placing the defense of the homeland at an unacceptable risk. The Committee realizes the significant demand for the new F-15EX aircraft, including an active duty aircraft requirement at Kadena, AB, Japan and for the Air National Guard operational units, and

for the Flying Training Unit. However, current fielding timelines are inadequate to protect the homeland, and at a time when the nation will embark on a national missile defense program that will take years to execute. Therefore, the Committee directs the Air Force to prioritize the fielding of the F-15EX and F-35A to Air National Guard installations with air control and sovereignty missions over the fielding and permanent stationing of such aircraft to overseas locations.

2. Bill Language for Recapitalization of Tactical Fighter Aircraft of the Navy Reserve

This bill language request would direct the Secretary of the Navy to provide all of the F/A-18E/F (Fighter) Hornet aircraft authorized and appropriated to be procured in Fiscal Year 2022 and Fiscal Year 2023 only to the Navy Reserve (USNR) and only to re-capitalize and maintain a deployable Navy Reserve strike fighter capability as well as a Navy Reserve threat representative adversary support capability for the active components. The proposed FY 2026 NDAA bill language request is identical to Section 134 of H.R. 8070, the House FY 2025 NDAA bill that passed the House in 2024.

The proposed FY 2026 NDAA bill language request is also very similar to the enacted bill language passed in Section 127 of *The Servicemember Quality of Life Improvement and National Defense Authorization Act* (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2025 (P.L. 118-159) to recapitalize tactical aircraft for the Navy Reserve.

Congress has defined the purpose of our service reserve components “to provide trained units and qualified persons available for active duty in the armed forces, in time of war or national emergency and at such other times as the national security may require, to fill the needs of the armed forces whenever more units and persons are needed than are in the regular components” (10 USC 10102).”

The Navy Reserve is the only service without a strategic strike fighter reserve force or capability that can be rapidly, and in a cost-effective manner, deployed to increase the lethality and/or depth of strategic forces, or rapidly replace combat losses. The Navy has spent the past several decades cannibalizing and obviating its strategic reserve air force, while the other services have increased investment in and readiness of their reserve forces. The Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard operate hundreds of front-line tactical aircraft based at scores of bases across the nation, which include F-35, F-15, F-16, A-10, B-1, and B-52 aircraft. These aircraft and the personnel that fly and maintain them are fully compatible with active-duty aircraft and regularly deploy in support of training, contingency, and combat operations. Even the smallest war-fighting service, the Marine Corps understands the value of a viable and deployable strike fighter reserve force and has committed to increasing the number of deployable reserve strike fighter squadrons from its current number. However, despite assurances to the contrary by the Navy and Navy Reserve to Congress up until late 2020, the Navy Reserve does not operate a single deployable strike fighter aircraft or have any air crew remotely current in carrier landing training. Current hostilities by Russia, continued belligerence by China, North Korea, and other non-state actors, and Naval Aviation’s continued Op Tempo, recruiting and retention challenges serve to underscore the short-sighted and unacceptable nature of this outcome.

The FY 2026 NDAA bill language request would ensure that the 8 F/A18-E/Fs authorized and designated for the Navy Reserve in FY 2023 as well as the 12 F/A18s authorized and funded in FY 2022 will actually be provided to the Navy Reserve. It could also help ensure that the Navy could recapitalize at least one if not two Tactical Support Wings of the Naval Reserve in order to maintain a deployable Navy Reserve strike fighter capability as well as a threat-representative advanced generation Reserve adversary support for the active components.

On March 3, 2020, the past Navy Reserve Commander, Vice Admiral Luke M. McCollum, testified before the House Subcommittee on Defense Appropriations that the “Navy’s current Master Aviation Plan shows an RC transition from the F/A18C to the F/A-18E in 2024-2025. Recapitalizing these jets will help maintain a strategic reserve and a more robust, threat-representative adversary capability. A continued focus on this transition is necessary to enhance lethality and preserve the operational and strategic value of these Reserve squadrons.” The two viable Navy Reserve F/A-18 squadrons were VFA-204 (JRB New Orleans) and VFC-12 (NAS Oceana, Virginia). In addition, it was understood that in 2012 or 2013 the Navy recommitted to the requirement of having two deployable strategic reserve squadrons, in the form of VFA-204 (JRB New Orleans) and VFC-12 (NAS Oceana). This requirement was codified in what is known as the Required Operational Capability (ROC)/Projected Operational Environment (POE) -ROC/POE analysis and validation, which are endorsed, validated, and approved at the OPNAV level.

However, in late 2020 and early 2021, the Navy’s original commitment to evolve VFA-204 (JRB New Orleans) to current model F-18 E/F aircraft changed. That commitment was made over many years and supported by multiple National Defense Authorization and Appropriations Acts as well as reports to Congress. The decisions to go in a completely different direction was made without any higher-level consultation with Congress.

Draft Language:

FY 2026 House NDAA, Division A, Title I, Procurement, Subtitle C-Navy Programs, Section ____:

SEC. ____ . RECAPITALIZATION OF TACTICAL FIGHTER AIRCRAFT OF THE NAVY

RESERVE.

(a) In General. The Secretary of the Navy shall ensure that all covered F-18 aircraft are--

(1) provided only to the Navy Reserve; and

(2) used only to recapitalize and maintain, within the Navy

Reserve—

(A) a deployable tactical strike-fighter capability; and

(B) a threat representative adversary support capability that may be used in support of training activities of the Department of Defense.

(b) Covered F-18 Aircraft Defined. In this section, the term

“covered F-18 aircraft” means any F/A-18E/F Super Hornet aircraft procured using funds appropriated for the Navy for fiscal year 2022 or fiscal year 2023.

3. Yard, Repair, Berthing and Messing (YRBM) Vessel Authorization

This bill language request would continue accelerating the construction of the new class of YRBMs (Yard, Repair, Berthing and Messing) barge craft that are critically needed to improve and modernize the living and housing conditions for thousands of Navy service personnel. The request would direct the Secretary of the Navy to submit a budget request for a multiyear procurement contract process for the YRBM program to maintain an accelerated procurement schedule for new YRBM vessels that would not cause a break in the production line and ensure that the procurement of these new vessels to significantly enhance the quality of life for thousands of Navy personnel are procured in the most cost-efficient manner.

On March 15, 2022, Conrad Industries/Shipyards in Morgan City/Amelia, La was awarded \$18,988,990 for the first of a new class of YRBM barges. The Navy requirement is currently for as many as 26 new YRBM vessels to replace the very old existing Navy berthing barges some of which are of WWII vintage. Each YRBM vessel will provide pier-side living accommodations for 199 mixed gender Navy personnel, messing for 300 personnel, and numerous other modern amenities, none of which currently exist on the existing very old berthing barges.

Since the award for the first vessel and options in March 2022, the Navy changed its original acquisition schedule and accelerated the awards and procurement of follow-on vessels in order to address the very substandard living conditions service personnel currently experience on the Navy's existing old berthing barges. The Navy has now awarded Conrad options for seven additional barges ahead of the original procurement schedule. To accelerate this procurement schedule, the Navy re-allocated shipbuilding funding appropriated in FY 2022 to fund two of these three additional barge vessels. The Navy's FY 2024 budget submission emphasized the importance of this program by including funding for the 6th, 7th, and 8th YRBM vessels to continue to accelerate the procurement schedule. In concurrence with this procurement objective, Congress added \$30,000,000 above the FY 24 request and funding in the final FY 24 Defense Appropriations bill to fund the 9th YRBM barge craft vessel of this important program.

The FY 24 Navy budget justifications submitted to Congress in early 2023 also stated that at least 1 YRBM vessel would be requested in FY 25 as well as one each in FYs 2026 through 2028. However, the Navy's FY 25 budget request changed the FY 24 projected procurement schedule and did not include even one YRBM barge craft for FY 2025. The FY 25 Navy budget justifications submitted to Congress in March 2024 projected the procurement of one additional YRBM vessel in FY 2026 and possibly 2 vessels in FY 2027 but none again until FY 2029 despite the Navy requirement of at least 26 new vessels.

To maintain the accelerated procurement schedule that the Navy supported until the FY 2025 budget request and to avoid a break in the production line, funding for 2 YRBM vessels is required in the final FY 2025 NDAA and Defense Appropriations bills. A break in the production line will significantly increase future YRBM vessel material, labor, and production costs. The costs associated with stopping and restarting the production line could range from 15% - 20% of the follow-on lead ship cost.

In an attempt to help mitigate any break in the production line and reduce overall YRBM program costs, Congress authorized \$30 million in the enacted FY 2025 NDAA and to date \$30 million has been provided in the FY 2025 House and Senate Defense Appropriations bills for one additional YRBM vessel. This request is critical to placing the YRBM back on the accelerated procurement schedule the Navy initiated in 2022 and to ensure that further delays in the delivery of these sorely needed modern berthing barges to house and feed Navy service personnel will not occur and force thousands of Navy personnel to continue to experience the current substandard living conditions in 50 to 80 year old Navy berthing barges.

Draft Language:

Division A, DoD Authorization, Title I, Procurement.

Subtitle C—Navy Programs:

Sec ____ Yard, Repair, Berthing and Messing vessel program (YRBM)

(a) To accelerate the procurement of new YRBM barge craft vessels to address the very substandard living conditions service personnel currently experience on the Navy's existing old berthing vessels that are 50 to 80 years old including some of which are of WWII vintage and to assist the Navy's shipyard repair sustainment initiatives focused on improving the Navy's on-time ship and submarine repair and delivery commitments at all Naval shipyards, the Secretary of the Navy is directed to implement and maintain an accelerated procurement schedule for new YRBM vessels that does not cause a break in the current production line, does not result in cost increases associated with re-starting the production line, and are procured in the most cost efficient manner.

(b) The Secretary of the Navy shall submit a fiscal year 2027 budget request to enter into one or more multiyear contracts, beginning with the fiscal year 2027 program year, for the procurement of the Yard, Repair, Berthing and Messing vessel program (YRBM).

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Troy A. Carter Sr.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Troy A. Carter Sr.
Member of Congress