STATEMENT OF

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MEMBER OF CONGRESS

BEFORE THE

HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON DEFENSE

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

ON

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INTRODUCTION

Chairman Frelinghuysen, Ranking Member Visclosky, distinguished members of the committee; it is my pleasure to appear before you today to testify on two issues important to our national security, the Department of Defense's changes to the Littoral Combat Ship program and the continuation of the Joint High Speed Vessel program.

I am sure that you know, the Independence variant of the Littoral Combat Ship and the Joint High Speed vessel are both made in my district, Mobile, Alabama. While I am committed to the great people of Alabama, I come to you with more concern for the future of our great Navy.

LITTORAL COMBAT SHIP

The Littoral Combat Ship is essential to missions in the world's littorals; it is being built in a manner that is both affordable and efficient; and it is critical if the Navy is to support the Administration's pivot towards the Asia-Pacific region. I think you will agree that the fastest route to a hollow force is to increase requirements on our forces without providing the assets to complete the mission.

The Secretary of Defense has directed the Navy to look at a different ship option for the last 20 ships of the 52 ship Littoral Combat Ship program. The specifications are due from the Navy this summer and it is my belief that a modified version of the LCS will be the best value for the tax payer while meeting the Navy's requirements of a capable and lethal surface combatant.

The LCS, designed with modularity in mind, can accept different mission sets and weapons systems with ease. If the Secretary of Defense wants a more lethal, small surface-combatant, he need not look any further. There is plenty of space and power available for a vertical launch missile system and a 76 MM gun, giving the LCS the knock down power of a Destroyer. This vessel is truly a plug and play system.

We should be extremely concerned about the slowing of the purchase of Littoral Combat Ships in the FY 15 budget. Reducing the ships in the LCS Program in FY15 through FY17 is simply a bad idea. This introduces instability in the LCS Program, as the shipbuilders in Alabama and Wisconsin and their suppliers priced the ship on a four-ship block buy and this instability will be felt by suppliers nationwide.

As you know, the Navy has continued to state its requirement for 52 Littoral Combat Ships (LCS). It is my belief that the LCS remains essential to the Navy's ability to project power, particularly to missions that don't require a destroyer or aircraft carrier. The LCS is a fast, versatile, fuel-efficient, and highly capable ship. LCS is extremely important to the Navy because it addresses three critical mission areas: anti-surface warfare, particularly against fast inshore attack craft, anti-submarine warfare, most notably against a proliferating diesel electric submarine threat, and mine warfare. The Navy has often stated that LCS will deliver capabilities in these mission areas that far exceed those capabilities in the fleet today. During the recently completed LCS War Game, the Navy has once again expressed their support and need for this program.

The LCS program is currently realizing significant efficiencies and savings. Moving to an entirely new ship will introduce tremendous cost increases and time delays to the Navy, two factors the Navy cannot afford. Failing to produce all 52 Littoral Combat Ships would significantly reduce the size of our fleet, set back the Navy's shipbuilding program for decades, and damage America's national security. Without all 52 ships, the Navy will be forced to cover the same geographic area with significantly fewer assets.

The LCS is the rare military program that has seen costs decrease instead of increase over time. The LCS has adhered to stringent contractual and budgetary constraints and is locked into fixed price contracts and a congressionally mandated cost cap. Littoral Combat Ships are being built today at an average cost of $350 million per hull, well under the Cost Cap and at half the cost of the first ships of class. According to the Navy, the LCS is the most affordable ship in its fleet.

The Navy was directed by the Department of Defense to reduce the LCS buy for Fiscal Year 2015 from four ships to three ships. This action introduces instability into the current program, as the builders and suppliers of LCS priced the ship on a four-ship buy, and will also greatly impact the shipyards in Alabama and Wisconsin, and the broader shipbuilding industrial base. There are tens of thousands of hardworking Americans whose jobs depend on the continued construction of these valuable ships. Because of these considerations, I ask that the Subcommittee to restore the funds necessary to add a fourth ship back into this year’s budget.

JOINT HIGH SPEED VESSEL

The Joint High Speed Vessel (JHSV) is also produced in my district. The JHSV is a shallow draft, all aluminum, commercial-based Catamaran capable of intra-theater personnel and cargo lift providing combatant commanders high-speed sealift mobility with inherent cargo handling capability and agility to achieve positional advantage over operational distances. The JHSV transports personnel, equipment, and supplies over operational distances with access to littoral offload points including austere, minor and degraded ports in support of military operations and humanitarian efforts. In automotive terms, the vessel has been compared to a pickup truck or utility vehicle.

The Department of Defense places a premium on the ability of U.S. military forces to deploy quickly to a full spectrum of engagements. In addition, the Department values the ability of U.S. forces to debark and embark in a wide range of port environments, from modern to austere. The JHSV, crewed by Military Sealift Command sailors, has demonstrated the ability to transport military forces, as well as humanitarian relief personnel and materiel, in a manner that is responsive, deployable, agile, versatile, and sustainable. USNS Spearhead (JHSV-1) is currently deployed to the 6th Fleet Area of Responsibility.

The JHSV is designed to transport 600 short tons of military cargo 1,200 nautical miles at an average speed of 35 knots in sea state 3. JHSVs support Navy Expeditionary Combat Command and riverine forces, theater cooperating missions, Seabees, Marine Corps and Army transportation. The original procurement objective, set in October 2008, was for 18 ships. This procurement number was lowered to 10 JHSVs as part of the Fiscal Year 2013 Budget Request.

Recently, before the Armed Services Committee, CNO Greenert mentioned the Navy's desire to modify the capabilities of the JHSV by testing the rail gun on the vessel. The versatility of the JHSV is undeniable when you think about its mission capability with such a unique offensive weapon in its service. The Navy has desperately been searching for a vessel to test this weapon on, and they've clearly chosen the JHSV for a reason.

Based on the ability of the JHSV to support all branches of the military services, provide high-speed intra-theater sealift, operate in littoral environments, operate in austere port environments, and support humanitarian/disaster relief activities, and because the ship's construction line is still operational, I believe the Department of the Navy should continue to procure JHSVs. Procuring additional JHSVs will enable the Navy to realize the hard earned efficiencies and cost reductions achieved by the shipyard in constructing JHSV-1 through JHSV-10. An additional $50 million in long lead advance procurement funding will enable the Navy to begin the process of procuring additional JHSVs in line with the original 18 ship requirement.

Like the LCS, the JHSV program provides the Navy with a very affordable and capable ship. At roughly $160M per ship, the JHSV costs a fraction of what other shipbuilding programs cost, and with production steaming along, we're rolling new JHSV's off the line every six months. The program has clearly matured into what can only be considered efficient, serial production. We shouldn't let that go to waste.

Thank you very much for your time today. I appreciate the opportunity to share my thoughts on these two valuable ships with the Subcommittee.