

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

April 25, 2022

The Honorable Adam Smith  
Chairman  
House Armed Service Committee  
2216 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Betty McCollum  
Chairwoman  
House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee  
H-405, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mike Rogers  
Ranking Member  
House Armed Services Committee  
2216 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Ken Calvert  
Ranking Member  
House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee  
H-405, The Capitol  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairs and Ranking Members:

As you consider the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 defense authorization and appropriations bills, we strongly urge your continued support for the F-35 Lightning II program.

Russia's most recent invasion of Ukraine, as well as China's continued attempts to challenge Taiwan's sovereignty, have confirmed a return to near-peer competition and conflict. This reality only further emphasizes the need for the United States and our allies to bolster cutting-edge platforms, such as F-35, to deter and, if necessary, defeat further aggression in the Indo-Pacific, Europe, and elsewhere. The F-35 is the only 5<sup>th</sup> generation fighter currently produced by the United States and our allies, and it is imperative that we continue to invest in the program to increase capacity and maintain a margin of capability required to dominate near-peer competitors in any potential conflict.

Last year was an important milestone for the F-35, as we saw the combined United States and allied fleets grow to over 750 total aircraft. Switzerland and Finland selected F-35 following competitions to replace their legacy fighter fleets. In doing so, Switzerland and Finland join the existing fourteen partner and Foreign Military Sale (FMS) countries. Finally, the F-35 successfully conducted several at-sea deployments to the Indo-Pacific region. Most notable is the combined United States-United Kingdom deployment aboard the HMS Queen Elizabeth and the U.S. Navy deployment aboard the USS Carl Vinson.

During testimony to Congress last year, key United States combatant commanders repeatedly emphasized the need for the F-35 within their Area of Responsibility. During his nomination hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Admiral John Aquilino, Commander, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command said, "I would be concerned if we lessened our capacity of fifth-generation airplanes. I think they're needed to win." During the annual United States European Command (USEUCOM) posture hearing before the House Armed Services Committee, General Tod Wolters, Commander, USEUCOM said, "The F-35's contribution at the tactical level and its ability to achieve access is unequal anywhere in the world. But its contributions at the strategic level for indications and warnings, command-and-control, and lethality from a mission command standpoint are daunting."

In addition to combatant commanders, Air Force Chief of Staff General Charles Q. Brown, Jr. has repeatedly referred to the F-35 as the "cornerstone" of the Air Force's tactical fighter fleet because of its ability to penetrate contested air space and act as a central node empowering Joint All Domain Operations (JADO). F-35 will also play an ever increasing and important role in manned-unmanned teaming

(MUMT), and no other aircraft has the capabilities integrated into the F-35 today that could act as a key node and enabler in the joint fight. Powered by the F135 engine, which is the most advanced fighter engine in the world with an unmatched low observable signature, the F-35 can conduct operations in highly contested environments. In addition to its stealth characteristics, F-35 possesses an unmatched sensor and communications suite that serves as a central node for U.S. and allied forces operating in the same area. The F-35 can penetrate deep into a contested area, gather valuable intelligence and targeting data, and pass that information back to legacy fighters and other air, ground, and maritime platforms.

Not only is the F-35 critical for the national security of the U.S. as well as our allies and partners, but it is also vital to the U.S. manufacturing base. Across our country more than 1,800 suppliers contribute to the F-35 enterprise, with one in every two of those companies being a small and/or disadvantaged business. The F-35 enterprise supports more than 254,000 high-tech, high-paying American jobs annually with thousands of those workers who are skilled union members. Further, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, this workforce has remained committed and resilient; they are a true national security asset. At a time when our economy has suffered the devastating effects of COVID-19, this program has continued to create jobs, foster workforce development, and spur economic opportunity.

As global threats continue to rise, it is critical that the United States and our allies stay the course and continue to invest in F-35 modernization (relevance), production (rate), and sustainment (readiness) for the program of record. It is disappointing that year after year the Department of Defense continues to underfund and inefficiently contract for additional advanced capabilities, flat-line or reduce F-35 production, defer modernization of the F135 engine, underfund spares, and defer readiness funding. The FY22 President's Budget Request included 85 F-35s (48As, 17Bs, and 20Cs), which fell woefully short of ramping toward full rate production levels for the US services requirements for approximately 134 F-35s per year (80As, 24Bs, and 30Cs). We are concerned that if we continue to underfund F-35, we will leave the Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps with a capability gap that legacy aircraft or new variants thereof cannot fulfill. Furthermore, by not investing in the modernization of the F135 engine additional risk and sustainment cost will be introduced into the F-35 program. These budgeting challenges will reduce the enterprise's ability to continue cost reduction activities at the planned rates, ultimately adding unnecessary life cycle cost into the system which will also result in delaying necessary capabilities being delivered to the warfighter.

Like last year's request, we ask that you once again support Relevance, Rate, and Readiness for the F35 for both the airframe (F-35) and the propulsion system (F135).

**Relevance (Modernization):** Support full funding for planned modernization activities for FY23 so that continued capability enhancements to the air vehicle and engine evolve to stay ahead of the rapidly advancing threats. This may require additional funds to restore previous funding reductions and to address development challenges to support the integration of critical capabilities and cutting-edge advanced weapons. Additionally, invest in propulsion growth to ensure the capabilities of the F135 engine (thrust, fuel efficiency, power and thermal management) is commensurate with the air vehicle and weapons systems requirements for all services and our foreign allies.

**Rate (Production):** Support the budget request and any service unfunded requirements to incrementally fund a production ramp toward full rate production (80As, 24Bs, and 30Cs) as well as initial spare parts and spare engines required to support production.

**Readiness (Sustainment):** Support funding to increase readiness and aircraft availability, help drive down sustainment costs, and increase repair capacity across the F-35 enterprise, including the air vehicle and the F135 engine. Currently the F135 is spared at 13% engines/modules, which is notably below legacy fighter programs (25-30%) and impacts mission capability rates. As engines prepare to enter their first

scheduled depot maintenance phase it is critical that additional funding is invested in spare parts, modules, and engines to mitigate readiness risks. Additionally, we would encourage the committees to promote a long-term, outcome-based sustainment contract for F-35 that will guarantee performance metrics at a fixed-price — a win-win for our men and women in uniform and the American taxpayers.

Thank you for your continued support of the F-35 program and for your leadership on defense and national security issues.

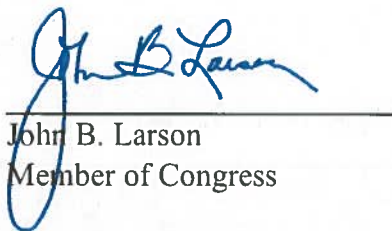
Sincerely,



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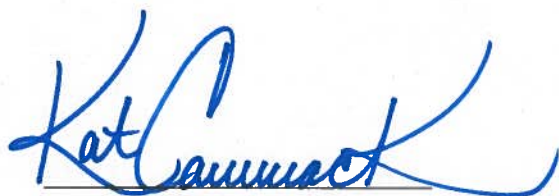
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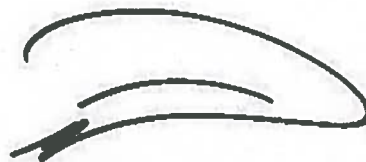
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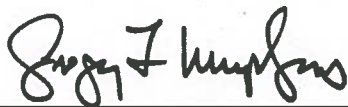
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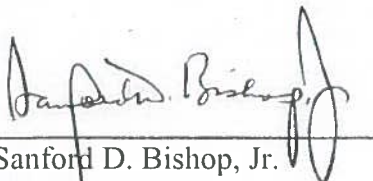




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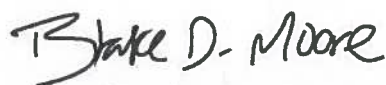
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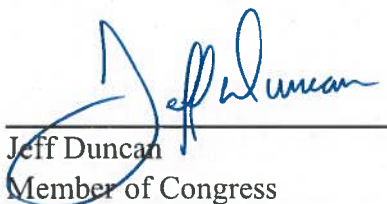
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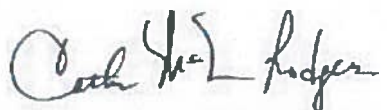
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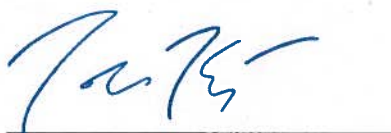
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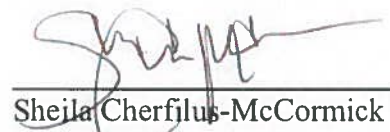
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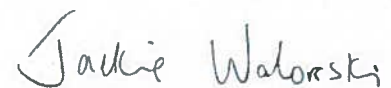
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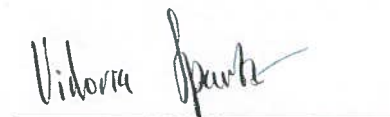
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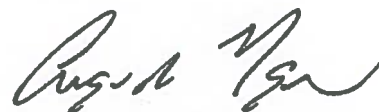
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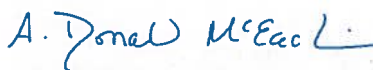
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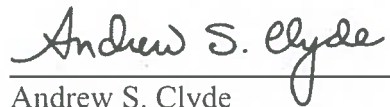




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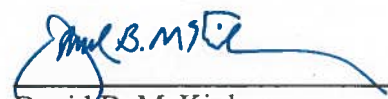


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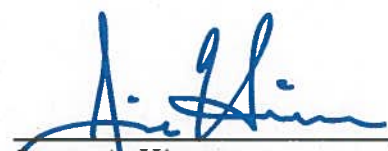
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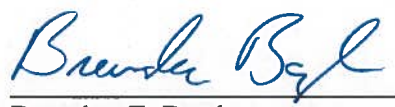
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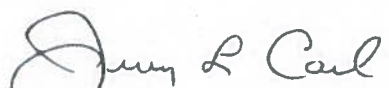
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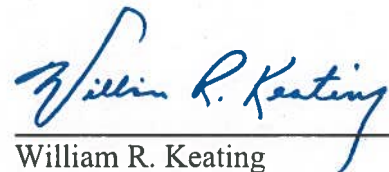
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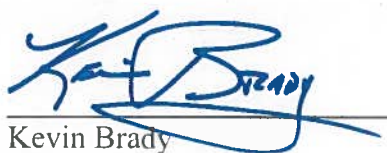
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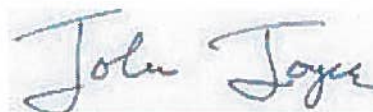
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