

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 6, 2016

The President  
The White House  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As you finalize your Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 budget request, we are writing in support of the Navy's current program of record for the Littoral Combat Ship (LCS). Specifically, we respectfully urge that your request include the full procurement of three LCS in FY2017 and support the Navy's long-term plan to purchase an additional three LCS in FY2018 and to transition to the Frigate (FF) in FY2019, for a total of 52 small surface combatants.

We have recently become aware of a memorandum from Secretary of Defense Ash Carter to Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus, in which he directs the Navy to "reduce the planned LCS/FF procurement from 52 ships to 40 ships," which would include cutting the LCS from three ships to one in each of FY2017 and FY2018. Such a short-sighted action would represent an extreme and highly disruptive change of course for the LCS program, resulting in catastrophic impacts to the two LCS shipyards and their suppliers in the already fragile shipbuilding industrial base, increased costs to American taxpayers, and unacceptable risk to our national security strategy. Accordingly, we call on you to reject Secretary Carter's proposal.

The Navy continues to strongly support the LCS current program of record. Senior leaders consistently state—supported by years of successive Navy budget requests and long-term planning—that 32 LCS and 20 Frigates, which will include significant lethality and survivability upgrades, are required to effectively support U.S. national security strategy around the world. For example, Admiral Harry Harris, Commander of U.S. Pacific Command, has called the LCS one of the Navy's most capable platforms, highlighting its centrality to the success of your administration's strategic rebalance to the Asia-Pacific. Chief of Naval Operations Admiral John Richardson reiterated the Navy's position that "LCS provides the Navy with critical capabilities to address validated gaps in Surface Warfare, Mine Countermeasures, and Anti-Submarine Warfare in both open ocean and the littorals."<sup>1</sup> The Navy is not alone in its reliance on the LCS for successful mission execution. Indeed, as Admiral Richardson noted, "LCS also supports deployed forward presence to meet Combatant Commander demand."<sup>2</sup>

In sum, the LCS continues to meet stated Navy requirements and the operational demands of combatant commanders, helping to affordably achieve the goal of maximizing U.S. global presence to reassure allies, deter adversaries and ensure peace, freedom of navigation, and

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<sup>1</sup> *Nomination of Admiral John M. Richardson, USN, To Be Chief of Naval Operations*: Hearing Before the Committee on Armed Services, United States Senate, One Hundred and Fourteenth Congress, First Session, July 30, 2015 (responses of Admiral Richardson to advance questions, p.23).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

international maritime commerce. In addition, because the LCS closes critical capability gaps that exist in today's fleet, continuation of the LCS program of record will also enhance the Navy's warfighting posture. Finally, these upgrades to the capacity and capability of the Navy fleet are taking place while the LCS program has seen overall improved performance, including successful operational deployments, downward cost trends, and timely production schedules.

Essential to that improved program performance are the hardworking men and women of the two shipyards that build the LCS and their shipbuilding industrial base suppliers, which are located in more than 40 states. Procuring only two ships in FY2017 and FY2018—instead of the six that are planned—would have a disastrous impact on continued operations at both LCS shipyards. Furthermore, such a reduction would represent a dramatic change in course from your administration's FY 2016 budget request for the LCS, which Congress recently supported in both the FY2016 National Defense Authorization Act and the Consolidated Appropriations Act for FY2016.

In addition, it does not make financial sense to severely reduce the Navy's most affordable surface warship while simultaneously remaining rightfully committed to the Navy's goal of a 308-ship fleet. We are concerned that the Department of Defense does not have a fiscally realistic alternative to meet this goal without the 52-ship LCS program of record. This reduction to LCS procurement quantities would only exacerbate the Department's budget situation by increasing the LCS per-ship cost for the remainder of the program. The two shipyards are optimized and staffed for two or more ships per year and over one hundred million dollars of private investment has been made at Marinette Marine based on a commitment of at least two ships per year.

Finally, we understand that budget constraints force you to make difficult choices in your annual budget request. However, the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015 responsibly removed austere caps on annual spending and allows for increased defense and non-defense discretionary funding through FY2017. We were pleased to work with you to achieve these results and we hope that this increased funding will prevent the need to propose severe budget cuts to critical programs that help keep our nation safe.

Thank you for your consideration. We remain committed to working with you in support of our Armed Forces and America's shipbuilding industry.

Sincerely,

  
Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator

  
Debbie Stabenow  
United States Senator

  
Gary Peters  
United States Senator

Cc: Shaun Donovan, Director, Office of Management and Budget