

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 24, 2009

The Honorable Robert M. Gates
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Mr. Secretary,

We are writing to express our concern with several news reports suggesting further contemplated reductions in our nation's aircraft carrier force structure as part of the Department of Defense's Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR). While we understand that QDR deliberations are still ongoing and therefore pre-decisional, we must take this opportunity to communicate our concerns so there is no confusion about our position. We believe it would be particularly difficult to find future Congressional support for any proposal that calls for a permanent force structure of fewer than 11 carriers at any time.

During your April 6, 2009 presentation as part of the Fiscal Year 2010 Budget Request rollout, you made several changes to future aircraft carrier construction schedules and reiterated the requirement for an 11 carrier force structure until at least 2040. We share your support of this requirement, which is consistent with current law (10 USC 5062).

While we have some reservations about the inefficiency and increased costs created by the shift to five-year cost centers, Congress has largely supported your recommendations in the Fiscal Year 2010 authorization and appropriations process. As you know, both the House of Representatives and the Senate have approved a temporary waiver to suspend Title 10, Section 5062 of US Code, and to accommodate the planned retirement of USS ENTERPRISE (CVN 65). Additionally, testimony by senior Navy officials before several congressional committees as part of the Fiscal Year 2010 budget submission suggests that operational risks can be mitigated during the three years when the nation will only have 10 aircraft carriers.

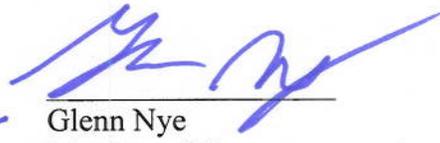
In recent years, Congress has approved several requests by the Navy for legislative relief in the deactivation and retirement of aging aircraft carriers. These requests led Congress to revise the original 12 carrier minimum and include the current 11 carrier minimum in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2007. However, we strongly believe that any further reductions below the current statutory minimum are not in our best national security interest.

Our nation's aircraft carriers have proven their versatility time and again in responding to world events. Successful in both traditional and non-traditional missions, no other platform has been as effective in enabling the United States to project power and protect our interests around the globe. In our view, aircraft carriers should remain a cornerstone of our future defense planning, and we urge your personal attention to this issue. We thank you for your service to our nation.

Respectfully yours,



Rob Wittman
Member of Congress



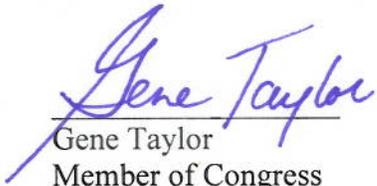
Glenn Nye
Member of Congress



J. Randy Forbes
Member of Congress



Bobby Scott
Member of Congress



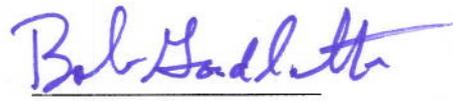
Gene Taylor
Member of Congress



Todd Akin
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Bob Goodlatte
Member of Congress



Frank Wolf
Member of Congress



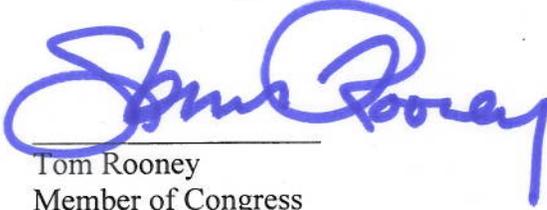
Joe Courtney
Member of Congress



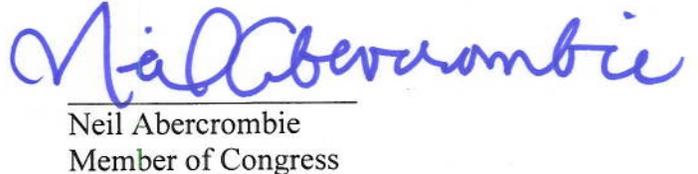
Eric Massa
Member of Congress



Duncan Hunter
Member of Congress



Tom Rooney
Member of Congress



Neil Abercrombie
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Ray Mabus, Secretary of the Navy
Admiral Michael Mullen, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
Admiral Gary Roughead, Chief of Naval Operations