

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 28, 2014

The Honorable Ray Mabus
Secretary of the Navy
Office of the Secretary of the Navy
2000 Navy Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20350-2000

Dear Secretary Mabus:

We write to request the restoration of planned funding for construction of the F-35 Vertical Lift Fan Repair and Test Facility at Fleet Readiness Center East in the Department of Navy's Future Years Defense Program (FYDP). In order to provide a reliable source of depot-level maintenance for the F-35B fleet, we believe construction for the facility should begin in fiscal year (FY) 2018.

Construction for this vital project was originally planned for FY 2012, but budgetary uncertainty and programmatic issues caused several delays in the projected allocations for the project and, eventually, its complete removal from the Navy's FYDP. Passage of The Bipartisan Budget Act of 2013 and the Fiscal Year 2014 Omnibus Appropriations restored some certainty to the budget process and removed most of the across-the-board sequestration cuts that have made budgeting for the Navy so incredibly difficult over the past few years. In light of these recent Congressional developments on the budget, we believe the Navy should provide its own level of certainty to the Joint Strike Fighter Program, the Marine Corps, and our international partners by including funding for the Vertical Lift Fan Repair and Test Facility in FY 2018.

A reliable, cost effective and diversified source of depot-level maintenance for the Marine Corps' F-35Bs and those of our international partners is absolutely essential. We believe there is high risk to readiness by relying on a single source of depot-level repair and testing for a high-stress component like the vertical lift fan (VLF) of the F-35B. We are also concerned that higher costs would result from solely using the original equipment manufacturer for all depot-level VLF repairs rather than using an organic facility like FRC-East.

We are encouraged that Lieutenant General Chris Bogand, who serves as the F-35 Lightning II Joint Program Office's Program Executive Officer, remains confident that the initial operating capability (IOC) for the Marine Corps' F-35B remains on schedule and will be achieved by the end of 2015. Therefore, in order to provide the necessary maintenance that these aircraft will require, planning and budgeting is needed now because of a minimum four-year capability establishment process.

The F-35B is the future of Marine Corps aviation and will insure the continued dominance of our expeditionary force well into the future. The short take off vertical landing (STOVL) technology of the F-35B will afford the Marine Corps unique capabilities, but it will also require robust maintenance proficiencies provided by the lift fan facility at FRC-East in order to keep these aircraft in top operating condition.

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We believe that now is the time for the Navy to act by providing funding in FY 2018 for the F-35 Vertical Lift Fan Repair and Test Facility at FRC-East. We look forward to working with the Navy on this very important matter.

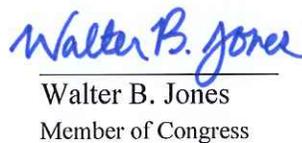
Thank you very much.

Very truly yours,


G. K. Butterfield
Member of Congress


Kay Hagan
United States Senator


George Holding
Member of Congress


Walter B. Jones
Member of Congress


Mike McIntyre
Member of Congress

cc:

Lieutenant General William M. Faulkner
Deputy Commandant
Installations and Logistics Headquarters, US Marine Corps
3000 Marine Corps Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20350-3000

Major General Juan Guadalupe Ayala
Commander
Marine Corps Installations Command (MCICOM)
3000 Marine Corps Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20350-3000