

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 5, 2021

The Honorable Jack Reed
Chairman
Senate Armed Services Committee
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jon Tester
Chairman
Senate Defense Appropriations Subcommittee
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable James Inhofe
Ranking Member
Senate Armed Services Committee
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Ranking Member
Senate Defense Appropriations Subcommittee
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairmen and Ranking Members:

As you consider the Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 defense authorization and appropriations bills, we strongly urge your continued support for the F-35 Lightning II program. We would urge the committee to support investments in relevance (modernization), readiness (sustainment) and rate (any service unfunded requirement).

Today, the United States Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force, together with our allies, are flying more than 620+ aircraft operating from 27 locations around the world. The F-35 strengthens national security, enhances global partnerships, and powers economic growth. The program leverages economies of scale, both in production and sustainment, to drive down cost and increase efficiencies while improving interoperability with our partners around the world.

As you know, near-peer adversaries like China and Russia continue to advance their air defense systems, develop their own 5th generation fighters, and invest heavily in emerging technologies that threaten America's military edge. It is with this in mind that we urge the committee to ensure that a robust modernization plan is supported to continue to insert advanced technologies and capabilities into the F-35. This may require additional funds to restore previous funding reductions, address performance challenges tied to TR-3, and support critical capabilities tied to Block 4 modernization to keep the F-35 ahead of our adversaries.

We further urge the committee to 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 engine. In order to prevent a capacity shortfall, we urge the committee to support additional funding to increase repair capacity for the both the industry teams and organic depots as it will require both to meet the total demand of the program.

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Further, adequate investments in the Reliability and Maintainability Improvement Program (RMIP) and Component Improvement Program (CIP) will increase readiness, bring costs down over the life of the program, and maintain flight safety.

It is thus essential that we continue toward full rate production of our nation's *only* 5th generation stealth fighter to recapitalize our fighter fleet and ensure the United States maintains air dominance. The F-35 is the only fighter in production that can produce aircraft in the numbers required to recap our aging fighter force and stay ahead of our adversaries.

The F-35 industrial base of more than 1,800 suppliers and more than 254,000 direct and indirect jobs across the country is ready to support production and while maintaining focus on driving down operations and sustainment costs across the enterprise.

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

Sincerely,

/s/Jeanne Shaheen
Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

/s/Richard Blumenthal
Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

/s/Susan Collins
Susan Collins
United States Senator

/s/Mike Crapo
Mike Crapo
United States Senator

/s/Margaret Wood Hassan
Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator

/s/Christopher S. Murphy
Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator

/s/John Cornyn
John Cornyn
United States Senator

/s/Richard Burr
Richard Burr
United States Senator

/s/Catherine Cortez Masto
Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator

/s/Diane Feinstein
Diane Feinstein
United States Senator

/s/Mark Kelly
Mark Kelly
United States Senator

/s/Gary C. Peters
Gary C. Peters
United States Senator

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/s/Jacky Rosen

Jacky Rosen
United States Senator

/s/Kyrsten Sinema

Kyrsten Sinema
United States Senator

/s/Debbie Stabenow

Debbie Stabenow
United States Senator

/s/Reverend Raphael Warnock

Reverend Raphael Warnock
United States Senator

/s/James E. Risch

James E. Risch
United States Senator

/s/Tim Scott

Tim Scott
United States Senator

/s/Thom Tillis

Thom Tillis
United States Senator

/s/Todd Young

Todd Young
United States Senator

