

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 26, 2025

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

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

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

The Honorable Betty McCollum
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) 2026 defense authorization and appropriations bills, we urge your continued support for the F-35 Lightning II and the F135 engine programs. The F-35 remains the only fifth-generation stealth fighter produced by the United States, and continued investment is imperative to sustain production capacity, enhance capability, and ensure the U.S. maintains a decisive advantage over near-peer competitors.

The F-35 serves as the cornerstone of the Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps' tactical fighter fleets due to its ability to penetrate contested airspace and act as a central node in joint operations. Designed as a network-centric platform, the F-35 gathers, processes, and disseminates vast amounts of data, enabling it to coordinate other assets, including drones, and serve as a critical command-and-control hub. No other aircraft matches the integrated capabilities of the F-35 in joint and coalition warfare. Recent operational successes, including deployments to the Indo-Pacific, combat effectiveness in the Middle East, and integration in allied exercises, further underscore the F-35's strategic importance. The aircraft delivers unmatched stealth, connectivity, and interoperability, strengthening alliance-based deterrence and ensuring the U.S. and its allies maintain a technological edge in modern warfare.

Beyond its national security value, the F-35 program is a key driver of the U.S. manufacturing base, supporting over 225,000 high-tech, high-paying jobs across more than 1,800 suppliers, half of which are small or disadvantaged businesses. Thousands of these workers are skilled union members, reinforcing the program's role in sustaining American manufacturing leadership. Moreover, the F-35 program has a significant impact on local economies, with suppliers and subcontractors located in nearly every state, contributing to the growth and development of communities across the country.

To maintain the F-35's dominance, modernizing the F135 engine through the Engine Core Upgrade (ECU) is critical. While the F-35 airframe has undergone multiple upgrades, the F135 has not received a commensurate propulsion update since entering service. Without modernization, engine durability and sustainment costs will be negatively impacted. Full funding for the ECU program is necessary to restore engine life, reduce lifecycle costs, and meet growing power and thermal demands.

As global threats rise, the U.S. and its allies must stay the course and invest in the F-35's sustainment, production, and modernization. We urge the committee's support for the following priorities in FY26:

Sustainment: We recommend an increase of \$500 million for the Air Force and Navy initial spares lines to address backlog, increase spares and depot material, and expand depot repair capacity. This investment will help improve mission capability rates and ensure the F-35 fleet remains ready to meet emerging threats. We also recommend a funding increase for critical spare and repair parts for the F135 engine.

Production: We urge support for the minimum procurement of 69 F-35 aircraft, as outlined in the FY25 Future Years Defense Program, to maintain fleet readiness and cost stability. This production level is essential to meet the warfighter's requirements and ensure the F-35 remains a vital component of U.S. and allied airpower.

Modernization: We recommend an additional \$400 million in funding to address existing shortfalls in current modernization projects, including enhancements to radar capabilities,

software upgrades for Electronic Warfare systems, and Mission Systems improvements. This investment will be crucial for the continuation of key initiatives and ensure the F-35 remains ahead of emerging threats.

These investments are vital to maintaining the F-35's dominance and ensuring it remains the backbone of U.S. and allied airpower. We appreciate your leadership and consideration of these priorities, which will strengthen our national defense, sustain the American industrial base, and ensure the U.S. maintains air superiority well into the future.

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

Sincerely,



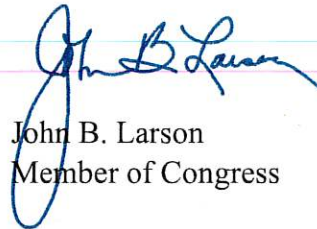
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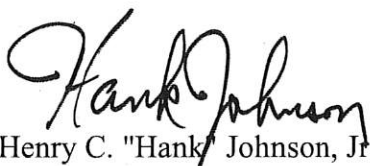
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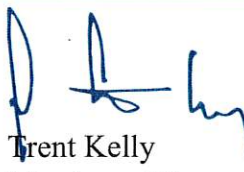
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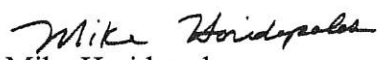
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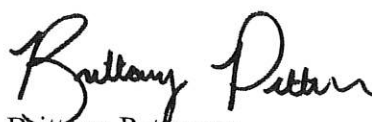
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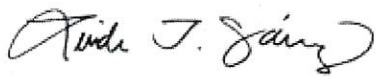
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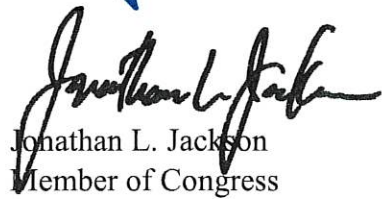
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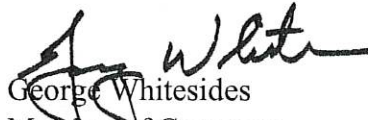
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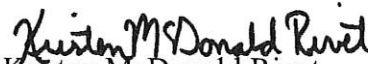
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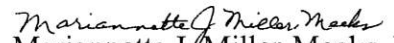
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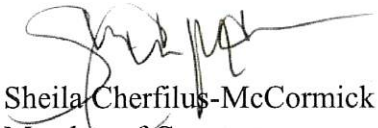
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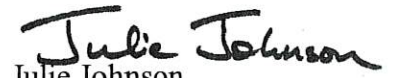
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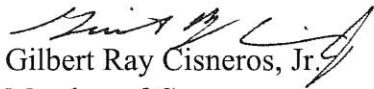
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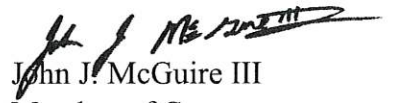
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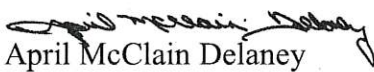
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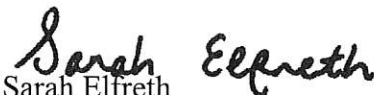
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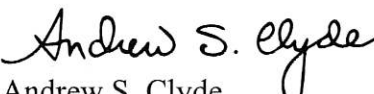
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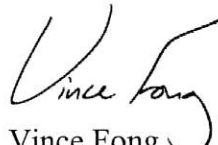
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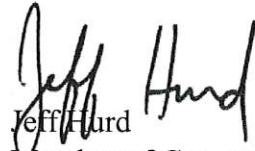
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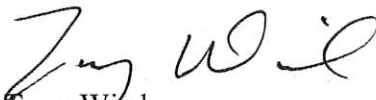
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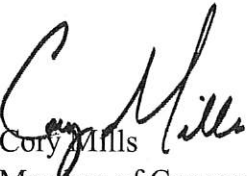
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