

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

December 11, 2008

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

Dear Secretary Gates:

We urge you to postpone the Navy's planned Record of Decision regarding the homeporting of additional ships at Naval Station Mayport, Florida. Due to the uncertain economic and federal budget outlook, the high level of community and political interest in this decision, and the fact that the final decision will require the Obama Administration to budget for this action ahead of many other competing unfunded priorities of the Department of Defense and the Navy, we view this action as the most reasonable option during this time of uncertainty.

The Navy's preferred alternative is to base a nuclear aircraft carrier out of Naval Station Mayport at a cost of \$534 million plus \$20 million in annual recurring costs. This cost is more than double the original estimate in the draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in March 2008. Because the final EIS was published on November 21, 2008, Navy officials can issue a Record of Decision as soon as 30 days afterwards, but they are free to postpone that decision as they deem necessary under the National Environmental Policy Act.

In some respects, the Mayport decision is similar to the Air Force tanker acquisition competition and the procurement of additional F-22s for the Air Force that were responsibly deferred to the next Administration. Each of these decisions will commit or free hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars, they have all faced scrutiny of the decision-making process, and in each case elected officials and outside parties have strong and opposing views on the decision.

However, unlike the two decisions already postponed, the decision to homeport a nuclear aircraft carrier at Naval Station Mayport is unique in at least one critical way: there is no consensus that the Mayport decision requires any urgency because it is a decision that can be made at any time. In contrast, regardless of one's position, there is broad consensus that the Air Force tanker acquisition requires quick action because of the aging of our current fleet and the time it would take to replace all the tankers. Likewise, there is a similar consensus that any decision on the advanced procurement for F-22s will require a quick decision in the Obama Administration.

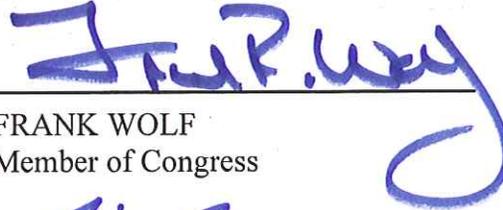
There is no need to rush the Mayport decision because the Navy's stated objective, to strategically disperse its fleet resources, such as aircraft carriers, is already being reached because of the constant deployment of aircraft carriers around the world for the foreseeable future. According to the Navy's own records, there have only been 34 days in the last six years where five of the East Coast-based carriers were in port at the same time, and that was when the USS Kennedy has been in Norfolk as part of its planned retirement. In addition to the aircraft carriers, the Navy faces no shortage of necessary fleet resources in the form of nuclear ports, which include five additional sites in addition to Norfolk Naval Station, Virginia at Bremerton, Washington; Everett Washington; Pearl Harbor, Hawaii; Yokosuka, Japan; and San Diego, California.

We have appreciated and admired your clear, thoughtful, and strategic-minded decision-making in your continued service as Secretary of Defense. We hope you will consider this letter as you consider the appropriate timing for a Record of Decision on the Mayport homeporting decision.

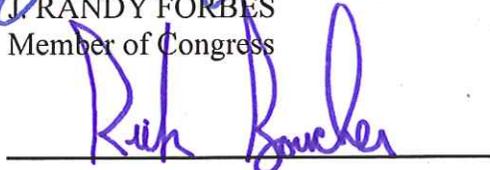
Sincerely,



J. RANDY FORBES
Member of Congress



FRANK WOLF
Member of Congress



RICK BOUCHER
Member of Congress



JIM MORAN
Member of Congress



BOB GOODLATTE
Member of Congress



BOBBY SCOTT
Member of Congress



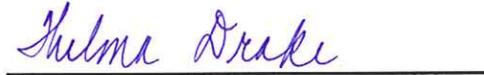
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