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J. Randy Forbes
United States Congress
4th District, Virginia

December 4, 2013

The Honorable Charles Hagel
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Hagel:

I am writing to express my concerns with the future capacity of the United States Navy's tactical aircraft industrial base. I hope that I can work with you to ensure a strong naval aviation industrial base and a Carrier Air Wing of the future that has a balance of both high- and low-end capabilities.

As you know, carrier-based aviation provides our Nation with a flexible means to project power anywhere in the world. As the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Jonathan Greenert, frequently argues, the true utility of an Aircraft Carrier lies in its modular ability to support various "payloads" to meet the security demands of the day. Today, American forces find themselves increasingly challenged by mature precision-strike regimes that will require an Air Wing possessing a combination of extended range, persistence, stealth, payload, and electronic warfare capabilities and operating at both the high and low-end of the cost-curve.

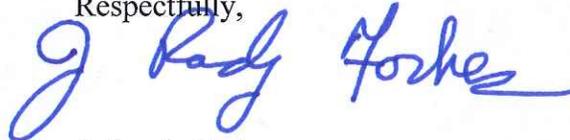
However, the Fiscal Year 2014 President's Budget request indicates the Navy's intention to end the production of its only manufacturing line capable of producing U.S. combat ready tactical aircraft and the only airborne electronic attack aircraft for the Nation. The F/A-18 E/F Super Hornet and EA-18G Growler offer the Navy a variety of the capabilities I have described above. With future carrier-based aircraft still in development until 2019, I strongly believe that creating a single U.S. tactical aircraft supply chain at this time is too great a risk.

Without a change to its budget plans, the Department will be left with a sole-source tactical aircraft program for the Navy. Moreover, the loss of industrial capacity provided by the F/A-18 manufacturing line will eliminate vital competition that could result in spiraling costs, leading to more expensive, less capable systems. This budget decision would also eliminate competition among aircraft radar and engine producers. In other instances, the Department has taken steps to appropriately ensure multiple manufacturers in the shipbuilding and submarine industries. The Navy and the Department should nurture its tactical aviation manufacturing in the same way.

Looking forward, investment in innovative technology and engineering for next-generation programs will be limited without a diverse tactical aviation base investing in tomorrow's capabilities. A limited industry would restrict the Department's drive to establish smarter contracting practices. In addition, a sole-source supply chain would be challenged to cope with changing demand, provide best-value capability, and reliability manage operational and readiness risks.

I respectfully ask you to respond as to how the Department is implementing policy related to preserving manufacturing capabilities within the defense industrial base for carrier-based tactical aviation, and I look forward to your reply.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "J. Randy Forbes". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and a long horizontal flourish at the end.

J. Randy Forbes
Member of Congress