

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 18, 2009

The Honorable Carl Levin
Chairman
228 Russell Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John McCain
Ranking Member
228 Russell Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Ike Skelton
Chairman
House Armed Services Committee
2120 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Howard P. McKeon
Ranking Member
House Armed Services Committee
2340 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairmen Levin and Skelton, and Ranking Members McCain and McKeon,

During the current conference of the House and Senate versions of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010, we write to urge your support for conferees adopting the bipartisan position taken by the House Armed Services Committee not to authorize an appropriation of \$46.3 million to dredge the channel and basin at Naval Station Mayport (NS Mayport), Florida.

Since the early 1990s, Congress, the House and Senate Armed Services Committees, the Navy, and the Department of Defense have assessed the costs, benefits, and environmental impacts of establishing a second homeport for nuclear-powered aircraft carriers (CVNs) on the East Coast. In each instance, Congress has not supported such proposals. The current homeporting project was a priority for former Secretary of the Navy Donald Winter. In January 2009, the Navy recommended that NS Mayport should become a homeport for nuclear-powered aircraft carriers and added funding in the FY-10 budget for this purpose.

In light of questions raised regarding the strategic necessity for this homeporting proposal and costs that could reach \$1 billion, the Department of Defense (DOD) decided to evaluate the project during the current Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR). Mindful of our increasingly fiscally constrained budget environment, we believe the QDR's review is the best approach to assess the military necessity, costs, and benefits associated with all aspects of carrier homeporting or port visits at NS Mayport.

Following the Department of Defense's action to delay the homeporting decision, the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) conducted an in-depth review to determine whether authorizing funding to dredge Mayport to accommodate a CVN was a prudent use of taxpayer dollars. The Committee concluded it would be premature to expend \$46.3 million to complete the project's first phase—dredging Mayport's channel and basin—until the QDR review was completed.

The Committee's bipartisan support for this position was clear and decisive. Both the Readiness Subcommittee and the HASC acted to remove the funding authorization, with the HASC voting decisively by an overwhelming 40-21-1 margin. There were no challenges to this position on the floor, and no amendments were offered to restore the funding authorization.

Because the Senate version of the National Defense Authorization Act differs from the House position by authorizing funding for channel dredging at NS Mayport, this issue must be resolved by House and Senate conferees. We believe that the House position on this funding authorization should be accepted by the conferees for the following reasons:

1. **Spending nearly \$50 million of taxpayer funds before the QDR review is completed is poor policy.** Advocates for CVN homeporting assert the dredging project is the first step in homeporting a CVN at Mayport, but the QDR has not completed its evaluation of the Navy's homeporting proposal. In addition, Congress will evaluate the QDR's decision and may hold hearings to determine whether the DOD's recommendation is in the best interest of the Navy, U.S. national security, and fiscal responsibility. It is premature to spend \$46.3 million to complete the first step in the expensive process of converting NS Mayport into a homeport for CVNs.
2. **The expense of transforming NS Mayport into a homeport for nuclear-powered aircraft carriers is fiscally irresponsible.** Military construction costs to convert NS Mayport into a homeport for CVNs are estimated at more than \$670 million and could easily reach \$1 billion after accounting for annual operations and maintenance costs. These funds could be better spent on other critical shortfalls in funding Navy procurement accounts or the Navy's \$28 billion backlog in shore facilities restoration and modernization. This autumn, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) will begin an investigation of the material condition of the four naval shipyards owing to the Navy's estimate of a \$1.3 billion funding backlog in the yards' validated sustainment, restoration, and modernization projects.
3. **The Navy has not justified the strategic or military requirements for deep dredging at NS Mayport nor creating an additional CVN homeport on the East Coast.** During the 48 years since the Navy's first nuclear-powered aircraft carrier was commissioned in 1961, the Navy has never had a second CVN homeport on the East Coast. The Navy did not strategically disperse its East Coast CVNs at the height of the Cold War, and it has not completed a comprehensive risk-based assessment of the costs and benefits to do so today. The Navy's proposal for CVN homeporting at Mayport described the risk of a catastrophic event in Hampton Roads as "small" and stated "no clear, credible threat distinguishes one homeport from the other."

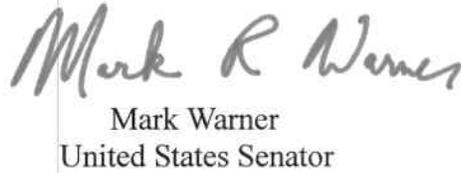
While we appreciate that the Department of Defense has appealed the House's decision to eliminate the dredging authorization, the Department's appeal fails to present a compelling explanation for the immediate need to expend \$46 million for dredging at Mayport before the QDR's evaluation of the Navy's homeporting proposal is completed.

As such, we urge the conferees to support the House position by not including authorization for funding for dredging at NS Mayport in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010. We appreciate your consideration of this request.

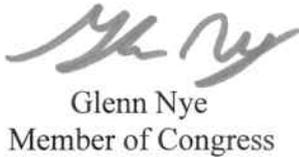
Sincerely,



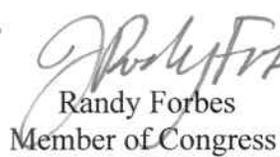
Jim Webb
United States Senator



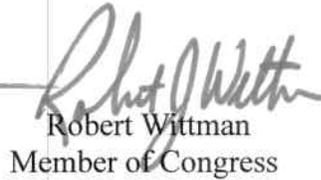
Mark Warner
United States Senator



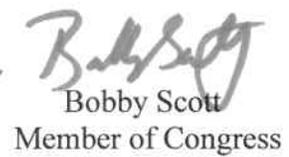
Glenn Nye
Member of Congress



Randy Forbes
Member of Congress



Robert Wittman
Member of Congress



Bobby Scott
Member of Congress