

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 5, 2019

The Honorable Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write today to express concerns about early reports regarding the Department of Defense (DoD) investment strategy for its fighter fleet proposed in the FY20 DoD budget request.

We understand that the proposed FY20 DoD budget request will abandon the strategy that has been in place since 2002 to procure an all 5th generation aircraft fighter fleet for the USAF and USMC. This proposal to procure “new” F-15s would result in nearly one-third of the future fighter fleet not capable of fighting high end conflicts.

While you may hear that this proposal to procure F-15Xs will not impact the anticipated procurement of F-35 aircraft in FY20, it is naïve to think that a continued investment to procure “new” F-15s would not impact critical air power investments in the years to come. Investing in “new” old aircraft does not align with congressional intent, presidential direction, nor does it align with the National Defense Strategy.

Let’s be clear, an F-15X purchase in FY20 would be a “new” aircraft procurement. The fact is that F-15s were last purchased by the USAF in 2001; and, since 2002, the USAF has only bought fifth generation aircraft (F-35s), although not at the numbers required to meet the growing threats. The F-15X is not flown today in the USAF inventory and would require significant investments to integrate this small fleet of aircraft into the USAF inventory.

This procurement appears to have been dropped into the budget without a validated DoD Joint Requirements Oversight Council (JROC) requirement, without verification of the technology readiness assessment (TRA), and without a fair and open competition and with the analytic rigor to merit a directed buy.

The fact that we are even discussing buying F-15 aircraft that the services have not procured for some 18 years is troubling in and of itself, but to think that the DoD would consider buying these aircraft with no regard to the acquisition process is even more troubling. Bypassing the acquisition process to initiate the purchase of a cold war era plane without identifying a valid requirement, performing an analysis of alternatives, and no competition simply does not make sense.

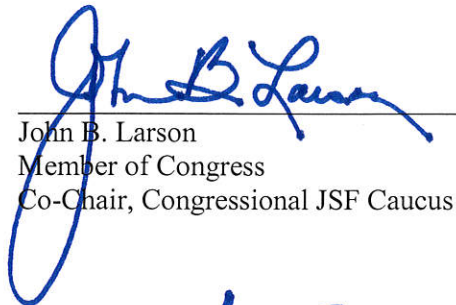
DoD already has a validated requirement for 2,456 F-35 aircraft. Further, DoD officials have testified for years that the DoD needs to buy F-35s in growing numbers so that the US services – and our allies - have enough F-35 aircraft by the mid-2020s to stay ahead of the advancing threat. F-35 is lower cost to procure, comparable cost to operate and support, and provides unmatched capability. It continues to frustrate us that year after year, the DoD flat-lines F-35 production investments, defers investments in readiness, and underfunds modernization for this critical fleet.

In fact, Chief of Staff of the US Air Force, General Goldfein, believes that the USAF needs 1,763 F-35s to meet the National Military Strategy and he has stated that he will not compromise on that requirement. However, because of budget constraints the USAF has limited its procurement of F-35 aircraft. Limiting procurement to 48 F-35 aircraft per year will mean that the USAF will not complete their buy of the required 1,763 F-35s until 2052 resulting in 9 to 10 fewer F-35 squadrons in 2030.

The F-35 Program has strengthened our alliances and extended the reach of our network with new partnerships. Procurement of the F-15X undermines our commitment to the F-35, detracts from our credibility in deterring common adversaries, and devalues allied investment in 5th generation aircraft capabilities and interoperability.

Mr. President, we must ensure that the men and women protecting our freedom have the best, most advanced capabilities that we have to offer. With the advancing threats today, we cannot afford to fight and deter a war without at least 50% of our fighter fleet as F-35 aircraft. The F-35 is more capable, will be more affordable, and the manufacturing line has capacity to deliver additional aircraft protecting the strong US manufacturing base. We would urge you to direct the DOD to ensure that it is making smart investments as you get ready to submit your FY20 budget request.

Sincerely,



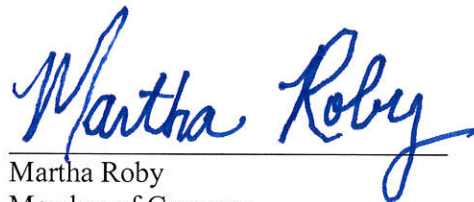
John B. Larson
Member of Congress
Co-Chair, Congressional JSF Caucus



Marc A. Veasey
Member of Congress
Co-Chair, Congressional JSF Caucus



Michael R. Turner
Member of Congress
Co-Chair, Congressional JSF Caucus



Martha Roby
Member of Congress
Co-Chair, Congressional JSF Caucus

CC:

The Honorable Patrick Shanahan, Acting Secretary of Defense

The Honorable Ellen Lord, Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment (A&S)