

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 27, 2023

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

The Honorable Mike Rogers
Chairman
House Armed Services 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

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

Dear Chairs and Ranking Members:

As you consider the Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 defense authorization and appropriations bills, we strongly urge your continued support for the F-35 Lightning II and the F135 engine program. The F-35 is the only 5th generation stealth fighter currently produced by the United States and our allies, and it is imperative that we continue to invest in the program to increase capacity and maintain a margin of capability required to dominate near-peer competitors in any potential conflict.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as well as China's continued attempts to challenge the sovereignty of the United States and our allies, have confirmed a return to near-peer competition and conflict. This reality only further emphasizes the need to bolster cutting-edge platforms, such as F-35, to deter and, if necessary, defeat further aggression in the Indo-Pacific, Europe, and elsewhere.

The F-35 enterprise is providing unmatched stealth, connectivity, and interoperability with our allies and enables alliance-based deterrence and diplomacy. It redefines how we train, fight, and win with our allies enabling critical joint capabilities and building coalitions while strengthening global security. Further, it powers job growth, workforce development, and economic opportunity across the United States.

The F-35 is the cornerstone of the Air Force's tactical fighter fleet because of its ability to penetrate contested air space and act as a central node empowering Joint All Domain Operations (JADO). F-35s will also play an ever increasing and important role in manned-unmanned teaming (MUMT), and no other aircraft has the capabilities integrated into the F-35 today that could act as a key node and enabler in the joint fight. The F-35 can conduct operations in highly contested environments. In addition to its stealth characteristics, the F-35 possesses an unmatched sensor and communications suite that serves as a central node for U.S. and allied forces operating in the same area. The F-35 can penetrate deep into a contested area, gather valuable intelligence and targeting data, and pass that information back to legacy fighters and other air, ground, and maritime platforms.

Not only is the F-35 critical for the national security of the U.S. as well as our allies and partners, but it is also vital to the U.S. manufacturing base. Across our country, more than 1,650 suppliers contribute to the F-35/F135 enterprise, with one in every two of those companies being a small and/or disadvantaged business. The F-35 enterprise supports more than 298,000 high-tech, high-paying American jobs annually with thousands of those workers who are skilled union members.

Additionally, to ensure the F-35 continues to be the preeminent 5th Generation fighter and the United States maintains a competitive edge against all adversaries, an Engine Core Upgrade (ECU) is necessary to modernize the F135. Since its entry to service, the F-35 air vehicle has been upgraded three times but there have been no commensurate propulsion upgrades to the F135 engine. While the F135 will continue to meet future mission requirements, absent engine modernization, engine durability and sustainment costs will be negatively affected. The F135 ECU enables Block 4 requirements.

As global threats continue to rise, it is critical that the United States and our allies stay the course and continue to invest in F-35 and F135 production (rate), modernization (relevance), and sustainment (readiness). As such we would urge the committees to support:

Rate (Production): Support the President's FY24 Budget Request (83 F-35s total, including 48 As, 16 Bs, 19 Cs) and any Services' unfunded requirements to support a ramp toward full rate production (80As, 24Bs, and 30Cs for the U.S. Services). A minimum of 89 aircraft is needed in FY24 to meet warfighter requirements and to maximize efficiencies along the production line. Also support initial spare parts and spare engines required to support production.

Relevance (Modernization): Support full funding for planned modernization and retrofit activities for FY24 for the integration of advanced capabilities to continually outpace the threat. Support additional Developmental Test aircraft to accelerate adoption and integration of new advanced capabilities. Fully fund F135 ECU to prepare the world's most capable fighter for today's threat and beyond.

Readiness (Sustainment): Support funding for USG depot stand-up and activation and for initial spares to increase readiness and aircraft availability, help drive down sustainment costs, and increase repair capacity across the F-35 enterprise, including the air vehicle and F135 engine. Currently, the F135 is spared at 13% engines/modules, which is notably below legacy fighter programs (25-30%) and impacts mission capability rates. As engines prepare to enter their first scheduled depot maintenance phase, it is critical that additional funding is invested in spare parts. Additionally, we would encourage the committees to promote a long-term, outcome-based sustainment approach for the program that will guarantee performance metrics at a fixed-price — a win-win for our men and women in uniform and the American taxpayers.

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


Sincerely,




Marc A. Veasey
Member of Congress




Michael R. Turner
Member of Congress



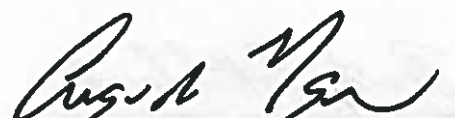
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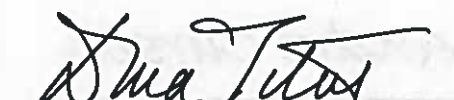
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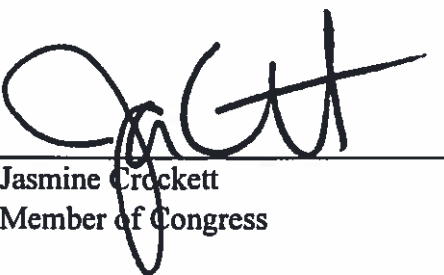
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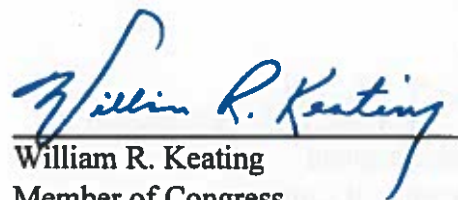
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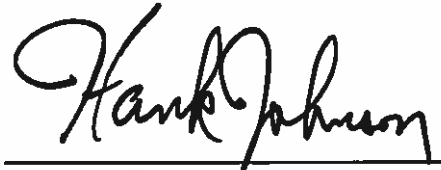
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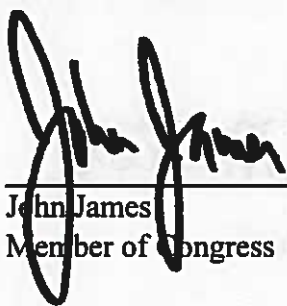
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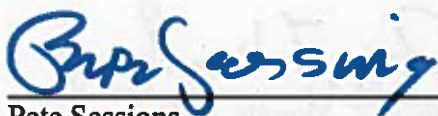
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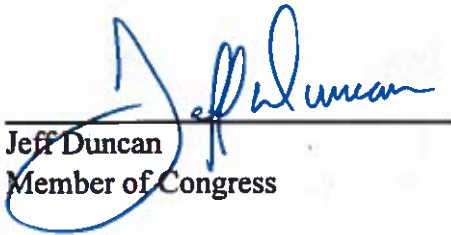
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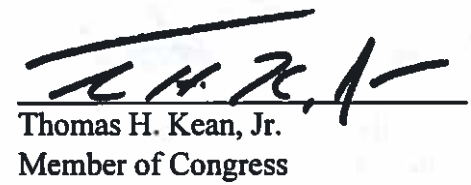
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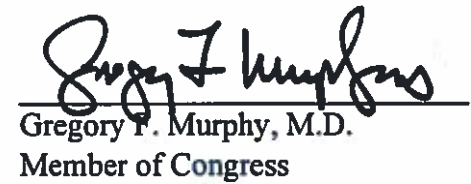
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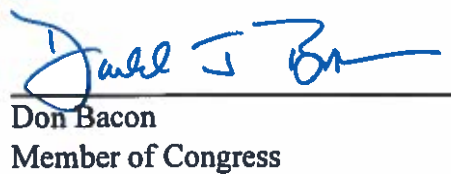
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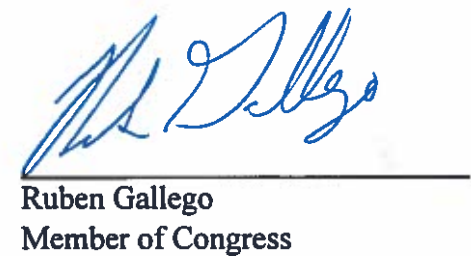
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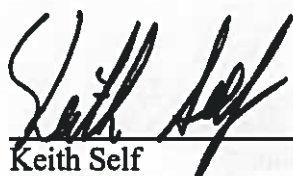
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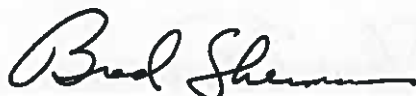
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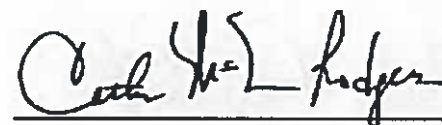
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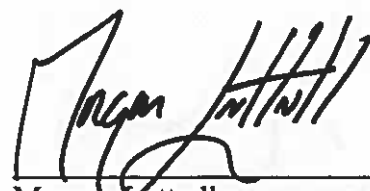
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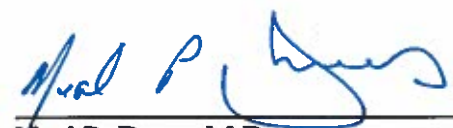
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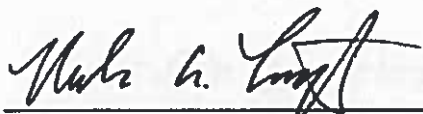
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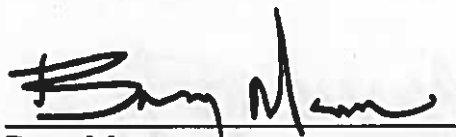
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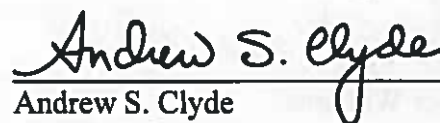
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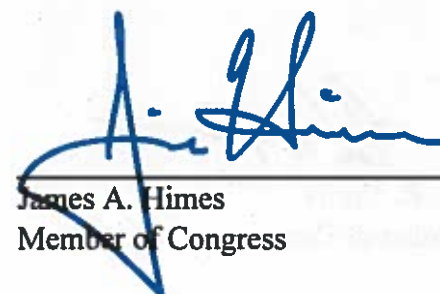
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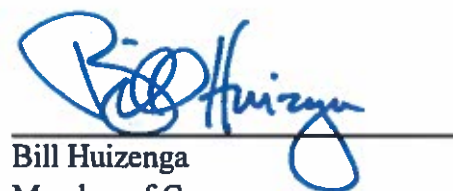
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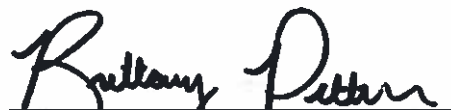
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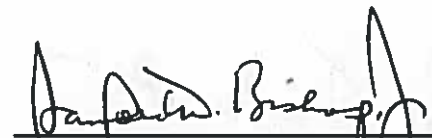
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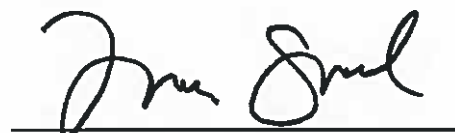
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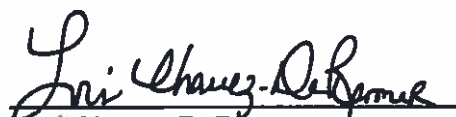
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