

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0908

February 25, 2021

The Honorable Lloyd Austin
Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

The Honorable Kathleen Hicks
Deputy Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense
1010 Defense Pentagon Washington
Washington, D.C. 20301-1010

Dear Secretary Austin and Deputy Secretary Hicks:

We write to express deep concern about the uncertainty surrounding this administration's commitment to the U.S. Navy's shipbuilding requirements and America's overall ability to project power throughout the world.

According to the Department of Defense's 2020 annual report to Congress, *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, "China has already achieved parity with—or even exceeded—the United States in several military modernization areas, including shipbuilding... [t]he PRC has the largest navy in the world, with an overall battle force of approximately 350 ships and submarines including over 130 major surface combatants." The report goes on to say that, "China is the top ship-producing nation in the world by tonnage and is increasing its shipbuilding capacity and capability for all naval classes." In Deputy Secretary Hicks' Senate confirmation hearing, she described China as the "measuring stick" by which America must gauge its own capabilities. The U.S. Navy must be prepared to compete, or we will face a future in which the seas are dominated by China.

Even more alarming are the predictions within the 2018 National Defense Strategy Commission, to which Deputy Secretary Hicks contributed. Within this document, the commission predicts a bleak future in which the People's Liberation Army Navy intimidates America and its allies through sea dominance, which results in China overwhelming Taiwan or denying America and its allies access to the South China Sea. The U.S. Navy has answered these predictions and responded to other national strategic documents by proposing an increase in ship numbers and capabilities in their report to Congress on the *Annual Long-Range Plan for Construction of Naval Vessels*. If implemented, this plan would increase America's ability to counter and deter Chinese influence abroad, and increase protection for American interests overseas and at home.

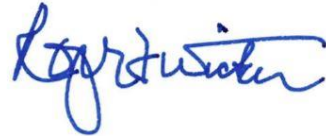
In your respective hearings with the Senate Committee on Armed Services, concerns regarding the Navy's ability to modernize and produce more ships were answered with a promise to review the situation, but no substantial commitments were made. As such, we request a formal response from the Defense Department which unequivocally commits to the requirements outlined in the U.S. Navy's shipbuilding plan. This is crucial to America's national security.

We look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Marco Rubio in black ink.

Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator

Handwritten signature of Roger F. Wicker in blue ink.

Roger F. Wicker
U.S. Senator

Handwritten signature of Cindy Hyde-Smith in black ink.

Cindy Hyde-Smith
U.S. Senator

Handwritten signature of Marsha Blackburn in black ink.

Marsha Blackburn
U.S. Senator

Handwritten signature of Rick Scott in blue ink.

Rick Scott
U.S. Senator