

SUSAN M. COLLINS, MAINE, CHAIR

MITCH McCONNELL, KENTUCKY
LISA MURKOWSKI, ALASKA
JERRY MORAN, KANSAS
JOHN HOEVEN, NORTH DAKOTA
JOHN BOOZMAN, ARKANSAS
SHELLEY MOORE CAPITO, WEST VIRGINIA
JOHN KENNEDY, LOUISIANA
CINDY HYDE-SMITH, MISSISSIPPI
BILL HAGERTY, TENNESSEE
KATIE BOYD BRITT, ALABAMA
DEB FISCHER, NEBRASKA
MIKE ROUNDS, SOUTH DAKOTA
JON HUSTED, OHIO
DARLINE GRAHAM, SOUTH CAROLINA

PATTY MURRAY, WASHINGTON, VICE CHAIR
RICHARD J. DURBIN, ILLINOIS
JACK REED, RHODE ISLAND
JEANNE SHAHEEN, NEW HAMPSHIRE
JEFF MERKLEY, OREGON
CHRISTOPHER A. COONS, DELAWARE
BRIAN SCHATZ, HAWAII
TAMMY BALDWIN, WISCONSIN
CHRISTOPHER MURPHY, CONNECTICUT
CHRIS VAN HOLLEN, MARYLAND
MARTIN HEINRICH, NEW MEXICO
GARY C. PETERS, MICHIGAN
KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND, NEW YORK
JON OSSOFF, GEORGIA

ELIZABETH McDONNELL, STAFF DIRECTOR
EVAN T. SCHATZ, DEMOCRATIC STAFF DIRECTOR



August 24, 2026

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary of War
Department of War
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

The Honorable Hung Cao
Acting Secretary of the Navy
Department of the Navy
1000 Navy Pentagon
Washington, DC 20350

Dear Secretary Hegseth and Acting Secretary Cao:

We are writing to express our deep concern regarding the recent extended deployments of the USS Gerald R. Ford and USS Abraham Lincoln, and the USS Benfold's recent undisclosed power loss, and what it means for our sailors, Marines, and their families, as well as for the Navy's overall military readiness. Given the serious quality of life and operational concerns that have been documented and the Department's inability—or refusal—to provide the congressional defense committees with full and accurate information, we request that the Navy initiate an immediate independent strategic review of these deployments, and brief Congress on its findings.

While the reporting that the Lincoln is now on its way home is welcome news, we still have many unanswered questions about the quality of life issues reported on these ships. This administration has tried to downplay or paper over these reports, but the fact is our servicemembers and their families have reported alarming concerns that deserve redress and accountability. Our military family members with loved ones serving on these ships deserve honest answers, and the Pentagon's denials to date are an insult to the service of these sailors and Marines.

These firsthand accounts from the Ford, Lincoln, and Benfold have included mental health and morale concerns, supply issues for basic necessities such as food, clean water and hygiene items, air conditioning, and cleanliness and sewage issues in bathrooms. There have also been reports of long lines at the mess halls and ship stores and disrupted and lost mail service. After working long shifts on duty during combat operations, our sailors and Marines should not have to worry about basic day-to-day functions, whether they'll have a full meal, or be able to communicate with their family members.

It also appears that the Navy was inadequately prepared for predictable risks associated with the Iran war, and we are deeply concerned about the implications for future operations or management of a peer conflict. Among these concerns is the availability of replacement carrier groups across the combatant commands and the disruption of the Navy's supply chain in the Middle East. We are also concerned about the future unbudgeted maintenance costs for the Ford

and Lincoln and the length of time required to complete these repairs, which have not yet been outlined to Congress despite our requests.

We insist you immediately direct an independent strategic review of the extended deployments of the Ford and Lincoln, and the Benfold's four-day power loss. This review should be conducted by senior civilian executives and former military officers. It should examine readiness issues relating to operations, manning, quality of life, including mental health, and culture on the ships as well as communications with the crews' families. The review should provide recommendations in these areas to improve future extended deployments for sailors and Marines serving on carriers and all other Department of the Navy vessels.

As you begin this investigation, please also provide responses to the following questions:

1. Will the Lincoln make a port call along its voyage home, allowing sailors and Marines to enjoy critical relief from intense combat operations?
2. When is the next town hall and virtual meeting scheduled for families of the sailors and Marines serving on the Lincoln? Will these outreach meetings continue on a regular basis until the carrier arrives home?
3. What homecoming support resources have been provided to the sailors and Marines on the Ford and their families since returning home? Will the same or additional resources be provided to the sailors and Marines on the Lincoln and their families?
4. What mental health and sexual assault prevention and response resources are available to the sailors and Marines on the Ford and Lincoln?
5. When will the congressional defense committees receive the final command investigation report from the extensive laundry fire on the Ford, which destroyed berthing quarters?
6. What actions has the Navy taken to address and prevent future power issues on the Benfold?
7. What steps is the Navy taking to prevent similar quality of life issues on the USS George H.W. Bush and USS George Washington and other ships currently deployed in the Middle East and globally?
8. What were the Navy's operational and contingency plans for deploying the Ford first to the Caribbean for Operation Southern Spear and then immediately to the Middle East?
9. What were the Navy's contingency plans for supply chain disruption and being forced to remain at sea rather than docked at an ally's port?
10. What is the maintenance schedule for the Ford and Lincoln? What are the costs associated with these repairs?
11. What is the Navy's contingency plan to meet force requirements, including during any potential conflict, while two carriers are undergoing unplanned maintenance?

We request a written response to these questions and establishment of an independent strategic review by September 1, 2026. Thank you for your prompt attention to these important issues.

Sincerely,



Patty Murray
Vice Chair
Committee on Appropriations



Christopher A. Coons
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Defense