

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 22, 2015

The Honorable John McCain
Chairman
Senate Armed Services Committee
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Senate Defense Appropriations Subcommittee
122 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Senate Armed Services Committee
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard J. Durbin
Ranking Member
Senate Defense Appropriations Subcommittee
122 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairmen McCain and Cochran and Ranking Members Reed and Durbin:

The Administration's Fiscal Year 2016 budget request includes funding for 57 F-35 Joint Strike Fighters. This is the first year of the production increases necessary to reach full rate production in Fiscal Year 2018. As you consider your respective Fiscal Year 2016 Defense Authorization and Appropriation bills, should additional funding become available for tactical aviation, we respectfully request that you add six Marine Corps F-35Bs, two Navy F-35Cs, and Advance Procurement for two F-35Cs.

As you are aware, the F-35 is the nation's only current 5th Generation stealth aircraft in production. The F-35 is the key to future air superiority for America and also our most important allies across the globe. The F-35's unmatched stealth, electronic warfare suite, situational awareness, and targeting identification capabilities are crucial to achieving air superiority in future surface-to-air and air-to-air threat environments without incurring significant losses. Russia and China are rapidly developing and flying their own advanced stealth fighter jets and weapons systems. These countries are also building and proliferating advanced surface-to-air missile systems that, when employed, threaten to make our 4th Generation fighter fleet obsolete. After years of delaying needed F-35 production increases, the rapidly advancing threats around the globe make a strong case for significantly increasing F-35 production to ensure the services have the 5th Generation inventory required to ensure air dominance in the mid-2020s.

Analysis using government models and scenarios shows that adding F-35s to the fight would significantly increase mission effectiveness and reduce combat losses more than any other tactical aviation platform in the U.S. inventory today. Additionally, analysis demonstrates that the F-35 requires far fewer support aircraft than current 4th Generation aircraft. The Department of Defense has a current validated requirement of 2,443 F-35s between the Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps. We need to accelerate production to fulfill this requirement sooner in order to meet the future threat facing both the joint force and our allies.

The Honorable John McCain, Thad Cochran, Jack Reed, and Richard J. Durbin

April 22, 2015

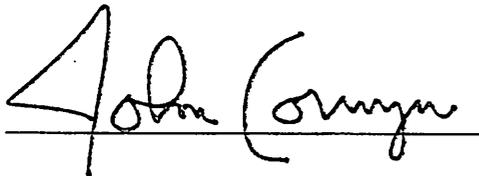
Page 2

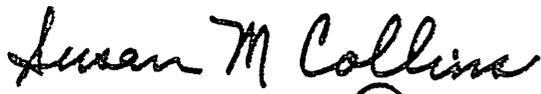
The Fiscal Year 2016 budget request includes funding for 57 F-35s, which includes 44 F-35As, 9 F-35Bs and 4 F-35Cs. Increasing production at this rate, or a higher one, is critical to reaching full rate production on time, further reducing costs to meet the government's objective of an \$80 million F-35A in Fiscal Year 2019 and mitigating the strike fighter shortfalls of all three U.S. services. Due to continued budget constraints, the Navy moved 16 F-35Cs out of its future year's defense plan. This will exacerbate the Navy's impending strike fighter shortfall and necessitates increasing F-35C production by two aircraft in both Fiscal Year 2016 and 2017. Adding F-35Cs will also bring F-35C production to the minimum efficient production rate of six aircraft per variant. Additionally, the Marine Corps continues to have a requirement to replace six AV-8B Harriers that were lost in combat in Afghanistan in 2012. Therefore, there is a need to increase F-35B production by six aircraft in Fiscal Year 2016 to replace those.

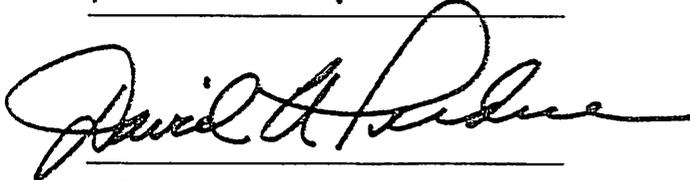
The facts are that the F-35 program is maturing, the design is stable, and the Marine Corps will declare its first squadron operational later this year. During the last six years, unit costs have been reduced by over 57% and almost all future cost reduction is predicated on aircraft quantities.

Again, we urge you to fully support the budget request and increase F-35 production, if funding becomes available. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,









*This side for
Democrat signers*

The Honorable John McCain, Thad Cochran, Jack Reed, and Richard J. Durbin

April 22, 2015

Page 3
