Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 16, 2016

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

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

The Honorable Mac Thornberry
Chairman
House Armed Services Committee
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

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

Dear Chairman McCain, Chairman Thornberry, Ranking Member Reed, and Ranking Member Smith:

As you reconcile the differences between the House-passed and Senate-passed versions of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2017, we urge you to ensure that the final NDAA addresses the Navy's top unfunded requirement related to F/A-18E/Fs "Super Hornet" aircraft.

As you know, the increased operational demand for Naval tactical aviation has created ripple effects which are being felt across the fleet. As the backbone of the Naval aviation fleet, older model F-18 Hornets remain backlogged in depot maintenance, and the Navy has been forced to place an unsustainable burden on newer F/A-18E/F "Super Hornets". In recognition of this growing problem, and to ease the burden on the F-18 enterprise, the Navy requested funding for 2 F/A-18E/Fs as part of its FY17 budget request and identified an additional 14 F/A-18E/Fs as the number one unfunded priority requirement.

The United States Navy can only meet our country's national security needs if we provide our servicemen and women the weapons systems required to get the job done. For this reason, we are pleased that the House of Representatives passed an NDAA which reflects the current shortfall in Naval tactical aviation and authorizes the procurement of 16 F/A-18 E/F's. Unfortunately, the Senate-passed NDAA authorized only two F/A-18E/Fs.

While larger topline budget issues will have to be resolved between the two committees, if sufficient funding is available, we urge you to include authorization in the final bill for 16 F/A-18E/Fs aircraft to address the Navy's top unfunded requirement and the national security needs of the United States.

Thank you for your leadership of these two important committees, and we appreciate your consideration of this important request.

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Sincerely,

Kelly A. Ayotte
United States Senator

Claire McCaskill
United States Senator

Roy Blunt
United States Senator

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

Mark Kirk
United States Senator