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THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
STRATEGIC FORCES SUBCOMMITTEE

STATEMENT

OF

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BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON STRATEGIC FORCES

OF THE

HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

ON

FY 2026 BUDGET REQUEST FOR NUCLEAR FORCES AND

ATOMIC ENERGY DEFENSE ACTIVITIES

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Introduction

Strategic Systems Programs' (SSP) mission is to deter strategic attack by providing credible and affordable nuclear and non-nuclear capabilities to the Warfighter to underwrite the security of our Nation. As the Navy command that provides cost-effective, safe, and secure sea-based strategic deterrence solutions, the SSP team is entrusted to provide cradle-to-grave lifecycle support to three critical programs: the TRIDENT II D5 Strategic Weapon System (SWS), Conventional Prompt Strike (CPS) hypersonics, and the Nuclear-Armed Sea-Launched Cruise Missile (SLCM-N) programs.

The U.S. nuclear triad's most survivable leg is provided by the sea-based strategic deterrent (SBSD). This force represents a substantial portion of our Nation's deployed nuclear warheads, providing an unyielding foundation for assured response against any adversary. The SBSD encompasses a formidable network of assets: the strategic nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) force, the TRIDENT II SWS and its associated nuclear warheads, the Navy Nuclear Command, Control, and Communications systems, and the crucial shore-based maintenance and security infrastructure. Underpinning these capabilities is a wide-ranging industrial base, ensuring the sustainment and modernization of this vital deterrent for decades to come.

Maintaining Unmatched Strength and Lethality

SSP's core mission supporting the sea-based leg of the nuclear triad comprises two fundamental lines of effort: the safety and security of our Nation's strategic assets entrusted to the Navy; and the design, development, production, and sustainment of the Navy's SWS. We strive to maintain a culture of excellence, underpinned by rigorous self-assessment, to achieve the highest standards of performance and integrity for personnel supporting the strategic deterrent mission. We focus unrelentingly on our tremendous responsibility for the custody and accountability of our Nation's nuclear assets. The men and women of SSP, our Sailors, our Marines, our Navy Masters at Arms, our Coast Guardsmen, and our industry partners remain dedicated to supporting the strategic deterrence mission, ready to respond to the emerging needs of our Warfighter, and committed to protecting and safeguarding our Nation's assets with which we are

entrusted. Thank you to the congressional defense committees for your unwavering and continuing support for our critical mission.

The safety, security and reliability of the Navy's nuclear weapons is SSP's highest priority. The SSP flight test program measures performance and reliability of the SWS in order to ensure military effectiveness. SSP has successfully conducted 193 flight tests of the TRIDENT II missile – the most recent of which occurred in April 2025. Furthermore, the Navy strictly complies with the Nuclear Weapons Surety Standard for all nuclear weapons in its custody and regularly evaluates itself to ensure we are meeting those standards. The TRIDENT II program is safe, secure, and highly reliable.

SSP Priorities: Lethality, Warfighting, Homeland Defense

SSP approaches our mission through the lens of our three main priorities:

- **Lethality**: SSP ensures the highest levels of readiness and modernization for the TRIDENT II (D5) SWS, providing critical support to the U.S. national strategy to deter any adversary who threatens the United States, our allies, or our interests.
- **Warfighting:** Our unwavering focus on designing, developing, and deploying the most advanced SLBM, SLCM-N, and hypersonic technology ensures the U.S. Navy maintains its competitive edge in an increasingly contested maritime domain.
- **Homeland Defense:** As the most survivable leg of the nuclear triad, the SBSD, under SSP's stewardship, stands constant, providing an unshakeable deterrent against attack on our homeland.

State of the Program

Today's strategic nuclear triad benefits from the strategic foresight and the decisions of those who have come before. Strategic investment into a nuclear weapons support infrastructure promoted both the safety and longevity of the SWS as well as the high levels of security required for weapons of such importance. After seven decades of use, the Navy must revitalize and build the capacity that will allow this infrastructure to continue to meet Warfighter requirements in the

face of evolving threats. In addition to revitalizing legacy infrastructure to sustain SWS shore operations, the Nuclear Enterprise, and SSP in particular, must prioritize expanded and new infrastructure to promote the safety, security, efficacy, and credibility of the SWS through 2084. These investments will be made in weapon design and development capacity, transportation and storage infrastructure, technical operations, and nuclear weapons security facilities.

A minimum of 12 COLUMBIA-class SSBNs, each equipped with 16 missile tubes, will replace the current fleet of 14 OHIO-class SSBNs, each equipped with 20 operational missile tubes (in accordance with the New START Treaty). The continued demonstrated high performance of the SWS will ensure the COLUMBIA-class meets U.S. Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM) direction to meet requirements derived from Presidential guidance. A decrease in demonstrated performance could impact the Navy's ability to meet USSTRATCOM requirements, which establish the minimum force necessary to deter adversary attack against the homeland and to provide the President with an assured survivable second-strike capability. For this reason, the Navy must maintain a robust OHIO-class SSBN age management program to avoid a degradation in mission capabilities in the transition as the COLUMBIA-class SSBN prepares to enter service.

The SBSD stands at a critical juncture. Decades of strategic foresight have delivered an unparalleled capability; but to maintain our advantage in the face of evolving threats, we must prioritize the modernization of our nuclear infrastructure and industrial base. SSP will continue to balance the following priorities as we move into a new era of balancing sustainment and new programs:

- **Prioritizing Modernization**: With their advanced capabilities, the COLUMBIA-class SSBN combined with its TRIDENT SWS, represent a generational leap forward in our undersea deterrent. With improvements in the SSBN platform come upgrades to the SWS as well – both the TRIDENT missile and its warhead. SSP is fully committed to ensuring a seamless transition from the OHIO-class SSBN, leveraging existing infrastructure while modernizing the SWS to meet the demands of the future.
- **Revitalizing the Industrial Base**: A strong domestic industrial base is the bedrock of a credible deterrent. SSP is actively working to revitalize this vital national asset, ensuring

the timely production and delivery of critical SWS components while fostering American jobs and technological superiority.

- **Confronting Emerging Threats**: In light of the ever evolving threat landscape, SSP is fully committed to investing in strategic deterrence technologies, including SLCM-N and conventional hypersonics, and strategies to protect our strategic assets from those who seek to undermine our national security.
- **Balancing Systems Integration**: SSP is the system integrator for the SWS. This requires our civilian workforce with critical knowledge of design, development, and sustainment to collaborate with industry partners in support of nuclear modernization.

SWS Sustainment on OHIO-Class SSBN and Procurement for COLUMBIA-Class SSBN

The 14 ship OHIO-class fleet remains the backbone of U.S. strategic deterrence, carrying approximately 70 percent of the U.S.'s New START Treaty-accountable deployed nuclear warheads in the form of the W76 and W88 families of warheads. Originally designed for a 30-year service life, the OHIO-class submarines were called upon to extend this service to 42 years, supporting a delay in investment in the next generation of SSBNs. To account for this extension in service life, SSP embarked on a life extension program for the TRIDENT II D5 missile to update critical, aging missile electronics systems. SSP introduced the first TRIDENT II D5 Life Extension (D5LE) program to the fleet in 2017 and the missile will remain an effective and credible SWS into the 2040s – supporting the OHIO-class submarine through end of service life and serving as the initial SWS for the COLUMBIA- and UK DREADNOUGHT-class SSBNs.

In parallel, SSP's program efforts and collaboration with the UK through the Polaris Sales Agreement, as amended (PSA) and Mutual Defense Agreement, as amended (MDA) support the UK's Continuous At Sea Deterrent through VANGUARD-class SSBN end of service life and the transition to a DREADNOUGHT-class SSBN fleet.

To meet these critical program responsibilities, SSP will sustain our deployed systems and modernize for our new ones, ensuring that we continue to keep the Navy's nuclear weapons safe and secure. We will develop and protect our logistics supply chain. Through these measures, SSP

will continue to unlock new capabilities that the Warfighter can leverage to enhance strategic deterrence and act decisively should deterrence fail.

TRIDENT II D5 Life Extension and Life Extension 2

The TRIDENT II D5 Life Extension 2 (D5LE2) program is essential to maintaining a credible SBSD through the life of the COLUMBIA-class SSBN. This program will:

- **Extend Service Life:** D5LE2 will replace the D5 and D5LE missiles to align with the COLUMBIA-class, ensuring a credible at-sea deterrent for decades to come.
- **Enhance Capabilities:** Using a hybrid approach of leveraging existing reliable technology and integrating cutting-edge advancements, D5LE2 will have the flexibility to counter emerging threats throughout its life.
- **Strengthen the Industrial Base:** D5LE2 is a critical driver in revitalizing our domestic industrial base, ensuring the availability of critical components and supporting American jobs.

As the Navy carefully manages the approach to end of life of our OHIO-class SSBNs, we have assessed how we can ensure the SWS is available throughout the life of the COLUMBIA-class SSBNs. A minimum of 12 COLUMBIA-class SSBNs will replace today's 14 OHIO-class SSBNs, and beginning in FY30, we will load current D5LE missiles on Hulls 1 through 8 of COLUMBIA-class SSBNs. Production of additional D5LE missiles is not practical due to obsolete parts and the current lack of a robust industrial base.

To meet inventory requirements and maintain a credible strategic deterrent in the face of evolving threats, we will need to design, engineer, produce, and deploy D5LE2 in time for strategic outload of COLUMBIA Hull 9. D5LE2 will be incorporated on all follow on COLUMBIA-class Hulls and later on COLUMBIA-class Hulls 1-8 during their Extended Refit Period from FY39-49. D5LE2's architecture will ensure the weapon system maintains demonstrated performance and survivability while facing a dynamic threat environment driven by multiple nuclear challengers until COLUMBIA-class end of life.

D5LE2 is a hybrid of existing, cost-effective technology (e.g., solid rocket motors, ignitors) and redesigned and updated components (e.g., avionics, guidance, system architecture); it is

structured to maintain today's unmatched reliability and demonstrated performance while unlocking untapped system potential to efficiently respond to emerging needs and to maintain a credible SBSD.

Industrial Base and Infrastructure

The Nation requires a modernized nuclear force and supporting infrastructure to execute our national strategy. Unlike SLBM programs of the past, D5LE2 does not have the benefit of a healthy defense industrial base that was historically built on simultaneously maintaining production and continuous development. Our modernization needs cannot succeed without investing in research and development, the critical skills in the workforce, and the facilities needed to produce, sustain, and certify our nuclear systems. Ensuring robust defense and aerospace industrial base capabilities—such as radiation-hardened electronics, strategic inertial instrumentation, and solid rocket motors—remains an important priority in conjunction with research and development investment.

SSP has placed particular emphasis on the Solid Rocket Motor (SRM) industry and its sub-tier suppliers. We appreciate the support of Congress to allow for the continuous production of these vital components. Over the past 15 years, the SRM industrial base waned following the completion of the Space Shuttle missions, Minuteman III re-graining, and disruption of the space launch market by new Liquid Rocket Engine entrants. However, SRM demand is increasing due to competing programs (CPS, Sentinel, Next Generation Interceptor) and production rate increases for D5LE and D5LE2. In addition, the TRIDENT II D5 SRM production line is aging and requires modernization in order to ensure production can continue well into the 2060s.

In short, full support of D5LE2 today is vital to achieving Initial Fleet Introduction in 2039 and to embarking on a path that maintains an SLBM deterrent capability through the service life of the COLUMBIA-class SSBNs. If the Nation does not continue to address these concerns, no amount of money will be able to mitigate the risks realized if we do not adequately prepare our industrial base.

In addition to SRMs, we also need a national capability to build aeroshells, which protect the payload upon re-entry to the atmosphere. The Navy has not delivered an integrated aeroshell

since the 1980s and needs to reinvigorate a production capability that only resides in a small cadre of highly skilled experts in an exceptionally niche industry. Aeroshell investment supports the Navy but will also be cost-effectively leveraged by our colleagues in the Air Force and our strategic partners in the United Kingdom as they pursue their independent warhead program endeavors.

The program's infrastructure is also at an inflection point, as existing facilities are reaching their 30-year recapitalization windows as we enter into a once-in-a-generation transition of both the weapons system and platform. The Navy relies on a limited footprint in Kings Bay, Georgia, Bangor, Washington, and Florida's Space Coast to process missiles and outfit the SSBNs. Maintaining and sustaining facilities is critical to meeting USSTRATCOM and Fleet mission requirements, as well as providing new capabilities through military construction. We will make smart investments to address capability gaps, throughput constraints, and design for surge capacity to address requirements presented by new and emerging threats. Our Nation and the Navy will continue to prioritize and resource the sustainment and modernization of its nuclear infrastructure enterprise to provide an effective and flexible deterrent now and into the future.

As the Navy executes the modernization and replacement of the SSBN and associated SLBM leg of the nuclear triad, DoD and the Department of Energy's (DOE) National Nuclear Security Administration's (NNSA) infrastructure must be prepared to respond in tandem to the evolving needs of the Nation. We must have an effective, resilient, and responsive plutonium pit production capability. This capability can address age-related risks, support planned refurbishments, as well as prepare for future uncertainty. Additionally, tritium, lithium, and uranium, and high explosives and energetics, among other strategic materials, are vital to ensuring the Navy can continue to meet its strategic deterrent requirements.

Efforts to sustain and modernize deterrent industrial base and infrastructure must continue. Our strategic forces underpin every military operation around the world, and we cannot afford to delay given the increasing threats facing our Nation.

Warhead and Reentry Body Activities

The Navy is also working in partnership with NNSA to refurbish our existing reentry systems and develop new reentry systems in response to USSTRATCOM requirements. As the threat environment faced by the nuclear enterprise continues to evolve, it is critical that the Navy designs, develops, and deploys programs that meet the needs of the Warfighter.

Today, the TRIDENT II D5 missile is capable of carrying two types of warhead families, the W76 and the W88. SSP is designing and developing a new warhead system: the W93 warhead and Mk7 reentry body system. It will be designed for use on both the D5LE and D5LE2 missiles and, through the PSA and MDA, and the Mk7 reentry body will support the UK's sovereign Replacement Warhead program.

W93/Mk7 will provide flexibility and adaptability to meet future Warfighter needs. With the near simultaneous age out of the deployed stockpile beginning in the 2040s, the W93/Mk7 will help address production concerns in the Nuclear Enterprise and ensure an uninterrupted at sea deterrent for the sea-based leg of the nuclear triad. In 2021, the Navy entered Phase 1 of the joint DoD-DOE Nuclear Weapons Lifecycle Process with NNSA for the W93. The Phase 1 effort addressed evolving ballistic missile warhead modernization requirements; improving operational effectiveness for USSTRATCOM; and mitigating technical, operational, and programmatic risk in the sea-based leg of the nuclear triad while simultaneously reinvigorating the atrophied industrial base. In FY22, the W93 program received Nuclear Weapons Council (NWC) authorization to enter Phase 2, Feasibility Study and Design Options, which further refined and matured the design of the W93/Mk7 program in a manner that provides an affordable, credible, safe, and secure weapon to the Warfighter. This marked the first time a nuclear weapons program had reached Phase 2 since the W88 which ended production in the 1990s. As of March 2025, the W93/Mk7 program proceeded into Phase 2A. The W93/Mk7 will not increase the size of the deployed stockpile and will not require underground nuclear explosive testing. The Navy will work in close coordination with the DoD, NNSA, NWC, and Congress as this effort matures.

Polaris Sales Agreement (PSA) and Mutual Defense Agreement (MDA): Support to the United Kingdom

Fundamental to U.S. strategic and extended deterrence policies is the special relationship between the U.S. and the UK through the 1958 MDA and the 1963 PSA. Under the PSA, the U.S. sells the TRIDENT II SWS to the UK along with associated support, testing and training equipment, and defense services. This sales agreement allows the U.S. to procure the SWS, other equipment, and services for the UK on U.S. contracts under the same terms and conditions as those for the United States, allowing for increased economies of scale and sharing certain costs and liabilities.

In particular, certain SWS equipment, including missiles, are "mingled" in common asset pools. Although the U.S. maintains these mingled assets in the United States, the UK retains right to title for mingled assets in the United States, and the United States transfers title to the UK for deployment. The United States and the UK proportionately share costs and liabilities to maintain (and eventually dispose) of mingled assets throughout their lifecycles.

Under the MDA, the United States cooperates with the UK on the uses of atomic energy for mutual defense purposes. The PSA and MDA agreements are complementary, and together enable the U.S. Navy to sell SWS delivery system and reentry body equipment to the UK, as well as to exchange controlled unclassified and classified information, including atomic information, with the UK. This framework has ensured the U.S. ability to support the UK with strategic capabilities to ensure a robust, sovereign nuclear deterrent.

SSP's key responsibility associated with the COLUMBIA-class program is the integration of the SWS onto the new SSBNs. A critical aspect is the Common Missile Compartment (CMC) that will support TRIDENT II SWS deployment on COLUMBIA-class SSBNs and the UK DREADNOUGHT-class SSBNs. The CMC represents the most recent example of the PSA partnership, in which our nations established a cost-sharing arrangement to design, develop, and produce common shipboard infrastructure that improves comingling of TRIDENT II D5 missile inventory and sets the stage to improve maintenance system consistency across the two fleets.

SSP also supports the SSBN Program Executive Office as it oversees U.S. industry's delivery of CMC components to both Navies for installation into their new SSBNs. Full lead ship

construction is in progress along with delivery of SWS equipment to the UK in support of construction and outfitting efforts under the authorities of the 1963 PSA.

As with the COLUMBIA-class SSBNs, the UK DREADNOUGHT-class SSBNs will initially carry the TRIDENT II D5LE missile. The development of the Mk7 reentry system to support the U.S. W93 warhead program is also critical to the UK's independent development of a next generation nuclear warhead and reentry system. Our nations are working separate and sovereign nuclear warhead programs that will leverage the Mk7 reentry system. SSP will continue to nurture and safeguard this special relationship with the UK as it contributes to ensuring peace through strength with the UK's Continuous At Sea Deterrent (CASD) today while modernizing and building flexibility, adaptability, and resiliency into the UK's future CASD.

Sea-Launched Cruise Missile, Nuclear

Today, our deterrent force is challenged by adversaries' theater nuclear capabilities for which we have limited response options and against which we must invest now in capabilities to maintain deterrence for the future. In the FY24 NDAA (Public Law 118-31), Congress directed establishment of a major defense acquisition program for SLCM-N. SLCM-N is a flexible, credible, and survivable sea-based regional deterrent capability designed to complement existing capabilities and to expand Presidential options.

In accordance with the FY24 NDAA, Navy established a SLCM-N Program Office at SSP in March 2024. Over the past year, SSP has focused on standing up this program office and conducting the assessments needed to deliver a weapon system that meets Warfighter needs. The SLCM-N program is focused on achieving a milestone decision in FY26 and continuing program assessments to buy down technical and programmatic risk. Executing this program requires careful balancing of resources to ensure existing critical Navy programs of record are not adversely impacted.

FY24 Research, Development, Test & Evaluation funding enabled the program to begin building the technical understanding and programmatic underpinnings in support of a SLCM-N capability delivery by FY34. Over the last year, the SLCM-N program has focused on understanding and determining the Weapon System's architectures. SLCM-N development will span the missile

system, fire control, launcher system, platform integration, and warhead system integration as well as development of applicable support equipment, telemetry and flight test hardware, ashore infrastructure, and training material. The program office has focused efforts on defining the system architecture that integrates these elements, conducting systems engineering analysis to inform key Materiel Solution Analysis (MSA) decisions, and establishing the acquisition framework that will enable successful program execution.

The program has conducted assessments of early candidate airframe options to understand the key technical challenges unique to developing SLCM-N. Challenges identified include integration of a nuclear warhead into a conventionally armed cruise missile design while meeting nuclear surety requirements and marinizing a missile not originally designed for underwater launch. In addition to these initial technical assessments, the program researched potential alternate airframe and component vendor options to understand the missile options that may best meet requirements and provide the best path to Initial Operating Capability (IOC) by FY34. Beyond SLCM-N airframe considerations, the Navy, in cooperation with NNSA, has worked to assess available warhead options for selection of a warhead that meets requirements.

The program has been equally focused on the integration of SLCM-N into the VIRGINIA-class Submarine. As the SLCM-N shipboard architecture matures, preliminary platform interfaces are being established, shipboard environments defined, and fire control solutions that meet nuclear surety requirements assessed. Over the last year, the SLCM-N program has conducted numerous programmatic and engineering assessments to help define and narrow the shipboard integration trade space and enable MSA engineering decisions. The SLCM-N weapon system is being designed and integrated with the intent to minimize impact to VIRGINIA-class readiness and operations.

In parallel with efforts to develop the missile system and integrate it into the submarine, the program is working to develop the supporting infrastructure needed to store, maintain, and deploy SLCM-N. The weapon will be stored and loaded at the Strategic Weapon Facilities (SWF) already used for the TRIDENT II D5 SWS and will leverage a combination of existing, modified, and new facilities at the SWFs. Early studies are focused on developing a plan for the SWFs that supports SLCM-N requirements while ensuring SWS programs of record are not impacted.

The Navy is moving rapidly to complete the activities needed for a successful milestone decision in FY26. Consistent funding resources are critical to the program's ability to deliver a system with an IOC by FY34. The ability to find and rapidly scale the workforce that will develop SLCM-N is critical to mission success.

Workforce

SSP's mission – strategic deterrence – is critical to this Nation. It is the foundation of the Interim National Defense Strategic Guidance and is the top priority of the Secretary of Defense. Based on the success of the TRIDENT program, SSP has also been tasked with rapidly developing and producing the Navy's first hypersonic weapon system, CPS, along with the Army's long range hypersonic weapons system. At the same time, SSP is currently developing the SLCM-N. This is a new capability that required the organization to establish a new program office, along with corresponding staff. Finally, I have Echelon I command responsibilities for the personnel that execute regulatory oversight of the Navy Nuclear Deterrence Mission and technical authority on Department of the Navy Nuclear Weapons and Nuclear Weapons systems, effort that provides a holistic Navy view of the no-fail mission.

Because of our demonstrated success, and the importance of these new programs, SSP's workforce has been growing and requires continued growth. SSP must recruit, train, and retain some of the most sought-after skills in the U.S. job market to support the breadth and complexity of SSP's strategic deterrence mission. SSP requires a workforce comprised of highly specialized, technical experts. Failing to appropriately staff this command would be catastrophic to the Navy's Fleet Ballistic Missile program, the Conventional Prompt Strike program and the Sea-Launched Cruise Missile – Nuclear program.

History reminds us that the swift, successful creation and execution of the Fleet Ballistic Missile program in the 1950s was truly a result of national commitment, congressional support, and a cadre of hand-selected scientists, engineers, and inspirational leaders. Though process will always underpin our efforts, our dedicated predecessors—civilians, military, and industry partners alike—responded to the national need with focused determination and propelled the program forward with a vision. People are as fundamental to our nuclear deterrent as the SWS itself. Today, SSP and its industry partners are focused on inspiring, growing, and retaining a

generation of workforce that did not live through the darkest days of the Cold War. Connecting a new workforce to this fundamental global security mission remains an important task shared among the entire nuclear enterprise.

Our mission has grown significantly, while our workforce size has not grown in the same proportion. Additionally, as the global threat environment has changed and the operational tempo has increased, the workforce is challenged to manage the increased strain on an already aging deployed weapons system. In order to accomplish SSP's sustainment and development missions, SSP must have trained, skilled employees on-board and able to work independently.

The next decade is a time of great importance to successfully accomplish concurrent development efforts, on top of the sustainment of the aging D5/D5LE weapon system. SSP has spent the past several years posturing its workforce, organizational structure, infrastructure, culture, and technical capabilities to ensure optimal success for the impending bow wave of critical development, testing, deployment, and sustainment.

Conclusion

Since the 1950s, our Nation's sea-based strategic deterrent has been a critical component of our national security and must continue to assure our allies and partners and deter potential adversaries well into the future. SSP ensures a safe, secure, effective, flexible, and strategic deterrent, with a steadfast focus on the proper stewardship, custody, and accountability of the nuclear assets entrusted to the Navy. Sustaining and modernizing the sea-based strategic deterrent capability is a vital national security requirement.

As the fourteenth Director at SSP, I have absolute faith and confidence in the safety, security, effectiveness, and credibility of our Navy's strategic deterrent due to the proficiency and professionalism of the dedicated service members and civilians committed to our mission. With continued Congressional support and stable, on-time funding, the Navy will continue to effectively defend our Nation and preserve peace for future generations.