

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0702

February 8, 2007

The Honorable John P. Murtha
Chairman
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense
Room H-149, the Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Murtha:

As you begin consideration of the President's Fiscal Year 2008 shipbuilding budget request, I write today to respectfully request your support for providing the necessary funding for the procurement of an additional Virginia class SSN. As you and I have discussed on a number of occasions, the Bush Administration's shipbuilding record prior to this budget year have steadily eroded the size of the submarine fleet.

This week the President submitted his FY2008 budget request, which unfortunately maintains the current procurement rate of one Virginia class SSN per year until FY2012. Based on the Navy's own stated force requirements, this will leave our nation with fewer than 48 SSNs for a 14 year period between 2020 and 2033, with a low of 40 ships from 2028 to 2029. At a time when our strategic competitors such as China are building an estimated 2.5 submarines a year, I believe that allowing our SSN force to decline to such an alarming degree places our nation at unnecessary long term strategic risk. As you have observed on a number of occasions, the staggering cost of short term operations in Iraq has put a terrible squeeze on critical defense infrastructure, such as the size of our Navy.

Yesterday, in his appearance before the House Armed Services Committee, General Peter Pace commended the men and women of Electric Boat in Groton as "the finest in the world." As the representative for eastern Connecticut, I know first hand the dedication that the designers, builders and suppliers of the Virginia class have for the work they do. However, I am deeply concerned that continuing to delay the procurement of a second Virginia class SSN could do serious and long standing harm to the submarine industrial base. In addition, the tremendous strides the workforce at Electric Boat has made to sharply reduce the production costs of the Virginia class will pay off to the American taxpayer if the size of the government's order is increased to two per year. Accelerating the increased procurement of the Virginia class SSN is the only way to ensure that our nation can continue to rely on the experience and expertise offered by this unique workforce.

The Virginia class SSN, with its unprecedented combination of firepower and stealth, must be a critical component of our armed services now and in the future. To this end, I respectfully request your support for providing the funding necessary to procure two Virginia class SSNs in FY2008.

Thank you for your strong support of our military, and I look forward to working with you to ensure the long term strength of our nuclear submarine force.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joe Courtney". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

JOE COURTNEY
Member of Congress