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February 5, 2020

The Honorable Mark Esper
Secretary of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Esper:

As you work to complete the Fiscal Year 2021 budget request for the Department of Defense, we write to underscore the critical need to sustain investment in our attack submarine fleet.

Under the Navy's current requirements, the attack submarine fleet faces the largest and most sustained delta between force structure requirements and inventory of any platform over the next three decades. We have heard repeatedly about the increasing strain placed on the fleet as the demand for undersea capabilities from our combatant commanders increases and our force structure decreases. At current levels, the submarine force is able to only meet about half of the combatant commanders needs and will decline from a fleet of 51 today to just 42 in 2027 – a nearly 20 percent reduction from current fleet levels. This is a deeply troubling trend given what we have heard from our military leaders and intelligence officials in public sessions and classified briefings *as recently as this week* regarding the undersea threats and challenges posed by our competitors around the globe.

That is why Congress has consistently supported the sustained two-a-year build rate of the Virginia Class submarine, as reflected in the FY2019 and FY2020 30-year shipbuilding plans, and consistent with the National Defense Strategy, to ensure that the nation has the most advanced and capable undersea fleet available to meet these challenges. While the recent Block V multi-year contract deviated from these plans with an acquisition strategy that funded 9 Virginia class submarines instead of the 11 requested in the FY20 budget and FYDP, Congressional concern ensured that the final contract included advanced long lead materials and the contractual option for a tenth.

Congress has made its direction to the department to pursue ten-boat block, with two submarines in FY21, absolutely clear. The House-Senate conference report for the Fiscal Year 2020 National Defense Authorization Act (PL116-92) states that:

> *The Navy has recently proposed a revised acquisition strategy with 9 Virginia-class submarines procured in fiscal years 2019 through 2023, with options to procure additional ships over that period. The conferees priority is to ensure the Navy fully preserves a plan to procure 10 Virginia-class attack submarines, nine of which include the VPM, and expects the Navy to budget accordingly in their fiscal year 2021 budget submission. Therefore, the conferees are providing the necessary*

additional Virginia-class advance procurement (AP) and procurement funds, including the AP funds needed to procure two submarines in fiscal year 2021, as submitted in the fiscal year 2020 budget as well as the 30-year shipbuilding plan.

The conference specifically included $200 million in advanced procurement to support procurement of two submarines in fiscal year 2021. This is in addition to prior-year funds already authorized and appropriated for the two planned 2021 submarines, and is supported by the Navy's own analysis of the readiness of the industrial base to sustain the two a year build rate. Of note, the final conference report for the FY20 NDAA passed through Congress with strong bipartisan support, passing the House 377-48 and the Senate 86-8. The FY2020 Consolidated Appropriations Act (PL 116-93) adopted this position as well, providing $200 million in advanced procurement to support two submarines in 2021. That measure passed with broad support in Congress, 280-138 in the House and 83-11 in the Senate.

We look forward to receiving a budget request that reflects these concerns and the clear intention of Congress to continue sustained investment in the future of our attack submarine platforms and capabilities.

Sincerely,

Joe Courtney
Chairman
Seapower and Projection
Forces Subcommittee

Rob Wittman
Ranking Member
Seapower and Projection
Forces Subcommittee

JDC:jpm

cc:
Ambassador Robert O'Brien, National Security Advisor
Thomas B. Modly, Acting Secretary of the Navy