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September 14, 2026

The Honorable Mike Rogers
Chairman
House Committee on Armed Services
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
House Committee on Armed Services
2216 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jack Bergman
Chairman
House Subcommittee on Readiness
566 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable John Garamendi
Ranking Member
House Subcommittee on Readiness
2428 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, Chairman Bergman, and Ranking Member Garamendi,

I am writing to you with regards to a recent Government Accountability Order (GAO) report, titled "Navy Readiness: Actions Needed to Address Costly Attack Submarine Maintenance Challenges", that was published and addressed to the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) on August 27, 2026.

GAO published this report in response to HASC's House Report 118-529, which accompanied the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2025. The House Report cited committee concerns about disturbing delays in submarine maintenance that both committee Members, like me, and staff saw as a hinderance to the undersea fleet's availability, at a time when the need for its persistent deterrence capability is critical.

As Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Seapower and Projection Forces and as the member who represents both Submarine Base New London – home to 15 attack submarines and approximately 7,000 sailors and officers, and Electric Boat shipyard in Groton, CT – the general contractor for the Virginia-class program, I read the unclassified and classified versions of the GAO report with great interest. I am writing to share comments on the unclassified content.

First and foremost, I think GAO did an admirable job of laying out the recent history of repair and maintenance delays. The report's data on attack submarines' lack of availability confirms what the committee suspected. Quantifying the financial costs, the waste of personnel time that results from poor planning, and capacity limitations is extremely valuable for the

committee's work both in the short- and long-term. Particularly helpful is GAO's analysis of the growing backlog of retired Los Angeles-class submarines that are consuming precious dry dock space at our public shipyards. There is no denying that the diminished capacity resulting from the aging-out and decommissioning of our Los Angeles-class fleet, at the same time operational attack Los Angeles, Virginia, and Seawolf need maintenance, must be mitigated. GAO's recommendation for "pier side" reactor defueling to free up dry dock space is useful, and both Congress and the Navy should explore, and hopefully execute, creative ways like this to manage waterfront capacity more efficiently. Having spoken to Navy leadership in the submarine force, it is clear that they agree with GAO's analysis and are hard at work developing ways to prioritize dry dock space for repair of operational submarines. Hopefully, we will hear directly from the Navy about such an enterprise soon.

There are a few items in the report, however, that as a Member who has been closely tracking submarine construction and repairs, I believe should be brought to Members' attention. In particular, it is important for the committee to note that the report does not include recent developments regarding the size of the attack submarine fleet, nor the congressionally funded public shipyard infrastructure improvements that in the last 2 years have shown real progress, particularly at the Portsmouth and Pearl Harbor public yards.

Regarding the first point, the report asserts that the United States has an attack submarine fleet size of 44 submarines, consisting of 20 Los Angeles-class submarines and 24 Virginia-class submarines at "the end of fiscal year of 2025". While accurate for those two classes of vessels on September 30, 2025, it does not reflect the composition of August 2026 fleet posture nor the total attack fleet inventory.

In particular, the report did not include three Seawolf-class attack submarines that the Navy continues to operate, nor the two new Virginia-class submarines—USS Massachusetts and USS Idaho—that were added to the fleet at the end of calendar year 2025, which was prior to the August 2026 release of GAO's report. I disagree with the report's decision not to include the Seawolf submarines based on mission set; they still perform attack submarine missions, and their maintenance affects fast attack availability. As someone who joined the Seawolf submarine, USS Connecticut, on an embark, I saw firsthand its attack submarine proficiency, that in many regards exceeds the Virginia-class fleet. To be fair, two Los Angeles-class submarines also held their inactivation ceremonies since the end of fiscal year 2025. With the addition of the Seawolf subs, the two new Virginia-class subs, and the removal of two more Los Angeles class subs, the net inventory would be 47.

Further, with Block V and Block VI Virginia-class submarines being classified as SSGNs, capable of performing both an attack and guided missile function, it would be helpful for GAO to explain why it did not include the three now-remaining Ohio-class SSGNs and if the methodology of this report would include these future Virginia-class submarines. The Ohio-class SSGNs are similarly armed with conventional Tomahawk missiles and torpedoes, capable of performing an attack submarine function. As such, it would be beneficial for the scope to have

included the impact on dry dock space and maintenance by including the Ohio-class SSGNs. The report also fails to mention that two more fast attack submarines—PCU Arkansas and PCU Utah—are today performing final sea trials with delivery targets of December 2026. The consideration of these changes brings the attack fleet to 52 vessels: a meaningful difference in maintenance requirements. I do not raise this point to be quarrelsome. In fact, the larger number, if anything, heightens the urgency of GAO’s recommendations since more submarines require more maintenance, which requires more dry dock capacity.

To that point, I think it is important to note that, over the last 8 years, HASC and the other defense committees have initiated and invested in the Shipyard Infrastructure Optimization Program to upgrade and expand our nation’s public shipyards. That \$21 billion-plus recapitalization is showing real progress, particularly at the Portsmouth and Pearl Harbor facilities where more drydock space is showing encouraging productivity. This progress is realized in the deliveries of USS Colorado ahead of schedule in June 2026¹ and USS North Dakota ahead of its rebaselined schedule in August 2026².

This report assesses that, prior to improvements by the Navy, attack submarine maintenance challenges will result in \$3.1 billion of additional costs through fiscal year 2030. This amount of funding is consequential but also became the primary focus of media reporting following this assessment’s publication without full consideration of the transformational work underway at the public yards, expanding and modernizing the long neglected, worn-out dry docks and waterfront. With this letter, I urge you and other interested Members to engage with the Direct Report Portfolio Manager, Submarines, to receive updates on the full scope of improvements the Navy is making to their maintenance schedule. This scope includes new strategies for nuclear defueling, plans for combining submarine crews, and technological advancements that save precious time. I also encourage Members to visit Portsmouth and Pearl Harbor to see for themselves the beneficial results of our committee’s focus on Navy infrastructure.

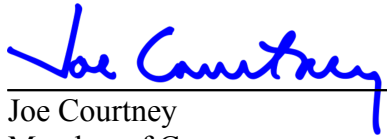
Lastly, I would remind my colleagues that, because of our work authorizing the Australia-United Kingdom-United States security agreement (AUKUS), our submarine fleet will have available new repair capacity forward-deployed in the Indo-Pacific at a new repair facility in Henderson, Western Australia. U.S. submarines will be commencing joint attack submarine rotations as part of AUKUS in 2027, and Australia is investing over \$8.5 billion USD to have repair availability for Virginia-class and their future SSN-AUKUS submarines. This location will provide relief for both Pearl Harbor and Puget Sound Public Shipyards, as well as reduce transit time for U.S. subs in need of repairs and overhaul. Already, USS Vermont completed a shorter, pier-side maintenance availability in November 2025, demonstrating the existing interoperability between the United States and Australia and the benefit of this expanded capacity.

¹ [USS Colorado returns to Fleet from maintenance ahead of schedule, accelerating Pacific readiness](#), 11 June 2026

² [PNSY Returns North Dakota to the Fleet](#), 31 August 2026

Thank you for your attention, and I hope the committee will continue its important, bipartisan work to ensure that submarine maintenance is completed efficiently and the on-time return of these platforms to the warfighter.

Sincerely,

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

Joe Courtney
Member of Congress
Ranking Member,
Subcommittee on Seapower
and Projection Forces