

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

January 28, 2022

The Honorable Carlos Del Toro
Secretary of the Navy
1000 Navy Pentagon
Washington, DC 20350-1000

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We write to thank you for your service to our brave service members in uniform and raise concerns with the Navy shipyards' performance. Specifically, we are concerned about the maintenance backlogs at the Navy's four government-operated naval shipyards – the primary facilities responsible for depot-level maintenance work on the Navy's Fast Attack Submarine Fleet. Our nation's Submarine Fleet plays an essential role in our national security and maintenance delays are degrading our nation's readiness. Submariners serving aboard these vessels spend months on end forward-deployed deterring adversaries and demonstrating commitment to the collective defense of our allies. We urge you to expand and improve shipyard performance to increase readiness.

A 2020 GAO report highlighted the troubling status of the SSN maintenance program where it found “the Navy's four shipyards completed five of 33 (15 percent) submarine maintenance periods for fiscal years 2015 through 2019 on time or early, and 28 of 33 (85 percent) late. Cumulatively, the completed submarine maintenance periods at the four shipyards were a total of 6,296 days late during this period, with an average of 225 days late for each delayed submarine maintenance period.

It is clear from this and other reports that the current maintenance plan is not sufficient to meet the Navy's submarine fleet's maintenance needs. While there are efficiencies to be gained from improved processes, additional shipyards would allow more submarines to enter the maintenance cycle simultaneously and improve overall fleet readiness. These shipyards require specialized equipment, such as drydocks, and a highly-skilled workforce trained to the necessary exacting standards.

Accordingly, to help us better understand the Navy's plans to improve fleet maintenance and overall readiness, please respond to the following questions:

- Does the Navy see the current Los Angeles and Virginia Class fast attack submarine maintenance backlog as a detriment to overall readiness?
- Would additional private or government-owned shipyards capable of conducting maintenance on fast attack submarines significantly reduce the backlog of maintenance and get ships back to the operating forces faster?
- Has the Navy conducted studies on the viability of contracting with new shipyards to conduct maintenance on fast attack submarines? If no, why not?

- Has the Navy considered establishing a Great Lakes maintenance facility? Lake Erie and Ohio possess a highly trained workforce and facilities that could be readily developed to serve the maintenance needs of the submarine force.

Ohio has a highly-trained, technical workforce and many small and medium-sized firms that manufacture parts for construction and maintenance of America's nuclear submarine and aircraft carrier fleets. Our labor force is highly-skilled and well-educated in the necessary technical know-how of industrial production. Ohio would welcome the opportunity to address the maintenance backlog of the Navy in an effective and cost-efficient manner and could train a world-class workforce ready to meet the highly technical requirements associated with the maintenance and overhaul of the nuclear fast attack submarine fleet.

Strategically located on the Great Lakes, Ohio possesses numerous locations suitable for the establishment of a private shipyard to conduct necessary submarine fleet maintenance. Existing shipyards have a long history conducting maintenance on maritime vessels and could readily pivot to submarine maintenance.

We thank you for your service to our nation and look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Rob Portman
United States Senator



Tim Ryan
Member of Congress



Marcy Kaptur
Member of Congress



Shontel Brown
Member of Congress