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COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5074
MINORITY (202) 225-5051
<https://oversight.house.gov>

Ranking Member Robert Garcia
Subcommittee on National Security, the Border, and Foreign Affairs
Hearing on “Strengthening the Fleet: Challenges and Solutions in Naval Surface Ship Construction”
May 11, 2023

Thank you, Chairman Grothman.

Maritime security is critical for our country. The security of our supply chains, and our allies in the Pacific is a priority for me, for Democrats, and for the Biden-Harris Administration.

That is why at the outset, I want to commend the Biden Administration on reaching the historic AUKUS agreement with Australia and the UK, that will provide Australia with submarine technology which will bolster security in the Indo-Pacific region.

In my district, Long Beach is a historic navy town that was the home port to the Navy’s first two aircraft carriers the USS Lexington and Saratoga.

While once a shipbuilding powerhouse, the industry in the U.S. has long been in decline. 40,000 shipbuilding jobs were lost during under President Reagan and the Long Beach shipyards closed in the 1990s causing a major economic blow to the community.

I fully understand the importance of shipbuilding to communities all around the country. Long Beach had to work hard to rebuild and reimagine itself as the thriving community it is today.

Now, the Port of Long Beach handles trade valued at \$200 billion annually and supports 2.6 million jobs across the United States. That would not be possible without the freedom of navigation guaranteed by the United States Navy.

You can slice and dice the numbers compared to China, or any other country, but evidence is clear. Whether you look at the size of vessels, the number, experience, and quality of our service members, the number and quality of our aircraft carriers and advanced submarines, even the number of our missiles, our Navy is the most powerful in the world. No one in the world can do what we do.

We are facing new challenges in the 21st century and the fast-moving technological environment creates real uncertainty. It is critical that we work together across the aisle, and with the Administration, to ensure that we efficiently harness American ingenuity, manpower, and our industrial base in order to keep pace.

The Biden Administration is working to craft a decisive plan to meet evolving military force needs and adapt to emerging threats. Congress should be a constructive partner in this planning to give domestic producers more certainty in our shipbuilding plans.

But it is critical to note that we can't just throw money at a problem, snap our fingers, and expect everything to be solved. We can't reflexively count the number of vessels in our fleet, or the number of dollars we devote to defense: we should make sure our investments deliver the security and the capabilities we need.

We need to make hard choices about our priorities. We must support policies that will rebuild our industrial base and our workforce.

The real source of our power is our economic strength, our industrial base, our moral leadership and our allies and partners.

We have learned hard lessons in the last few years—the war in Ukraine and the Covid-era supply chain disruptions have emphasized a point that many experts have been making for decades: the ability to build, produce and acquire key goods, whether medical supplies, or ships, is critical to our security.

We can and should secure those supply chains while creating and protecting good union jobs.

Investments like the Chips and Science Act, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and the Inflation Reduction Act contribute directly to our security by investing in American jobs, by rebuilding our manufacturing base and by promoting a secure, clean energy future to protect our supply chains and ensure economic prosperity for all Americans.

As the saying goes, and as is appropriate for this hearing—"A rising tide raises all boats."

And while I am glad that we are having this hearing, I want to briefly address another key issue for American shipbuilding and security: our Merchant Marine fleet.

In a crisis, American civilian vessels will be critical to supplying our allies and partners, and our military. I understand that the Marine Corps is deepening its partnership with our Merchant Marine, which is encouraging.

Congress can and should do more to support merchant marine shipbuilding, along with our ports and our supply chains and Mr. Chairman, I hope to work with you on this critical issue.

Finally, I want to stress an important point: no conflict is ever inevitable, and I want to warn this committee against reckless or overheated rhetoric. Our goal, standing shoulder to shoulder with our allies, is to have world where peaceful dialogue and cooperation is possible.

With that, I'd like to thank both of our witnesses for their service to our country and for being here today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

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