

JIM WEBB

VIRGINIA

COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES

COMMITTEE ON
FOREIGN RELATIONS

COMMITTEE ON
VETERANS' AFFAIRS

JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE

WASHINGTON OFFICE:

WASHINGTON, DC 20510
(202) 224-4024

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4605

January 8, 2009

The Honorable Carl Levin
Chairman
Senate Committee on Armed Services
269 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John McCain
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Armed Services
241 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Daniel Inouye
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
722 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee
113 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairmen Levin and Inouye and Ranking Members McCain and Cochran:

On November 18, Senator John Warner and I were briefed on the Navy's proposal, as part of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process, to base a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier at Naval Station Mayport. At that time, based on the briefing we received, we wrote Secretary of Defense Gates to communicate our extreme concern that the Navy made no compelling argument to justify its decision.

With the benefit of additional research and study since that first briefing, I am convinced more strongly than ever that the Navy's flawed and incomplete analysis does not demonstrate a strategic necessity for relocating an aircraft carrier to Mayport nor does it reflect the most basic economic logic. The Navy's efforts to fast-track the environmental review process so that it could issue its Record of Decision in early January also are a cause for concern.

The Congressional Budget Office's (CBO) new report on the economy states that we have entered a recession that will probably be the longest and the deepest since World War II. As a share of the economy, the CBO estimates the deficit in 2009 also will be the largest recorded since World War II—\$1.2 trillion, or 8.3 percent of the nation's gross domestic product. Federal revenues are expected to decline by \$166 billion, or 6.6 percent, from 2008.

The CBO also reported this month that carrying out the defense spending plans of the Bush administration's fiscal year 2009 Future Years Defense Program would require sustaining annual defense spending over the long term at higher real (i.e., inflation-adjusted) levels than those that occurred at the peak of

the defense build-up in the mid-1980s. Last year, the Navy identified \$4.6 billion in Fiscal Year 2009 unfunded budget requirements. Its budget accounts for shipbuilding, aircraft procurement, and military construction are substantially underfunded. In the face of these economic and defense realities, the Navy's homeporting proposal is fiscally irresponsible.

I have enclosed for your consideration my staff report on the Navy's homeporting proposal. Its findings fundamentally challenge the Navy's strategic rationale, fiscal responsibility, and environmental assessment. It also highlights how the Navy has not addressed its homeporting proposal's potentially adverse impacts on Sailors and families.

At a cost that could approach \$1 billion, the Navy's proposal to homeport a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier in Mayport is a luxury it simply cannot afford.

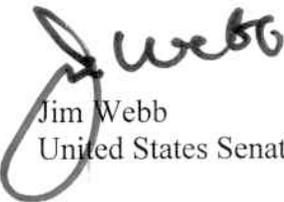
I wish to emphasize that the Navy's need to retain Naval Station Mayport as an operational base for surface ships is not questioned; at issue is the need for the Navy to adopt a more cost-effective, responsible homeporting alternative. The Navy should place a greater focus on identifying the platforms that are more responsive to the operational requirements defined by the commander of the U.S. Southern Command for his geographic area of responsibility.

In my view, this focus should center on such surface combatants as the littoral combat ship, guided-missile destroyers, guided-missile cruisers, or an amphibious assault ship. The homeporting of these ship classes in Mayport also would result in more business for private ship-repair companies in Jacksonville—a significant consideration if we are to sustain this strategically important segment of our nation's industrial base.

It is not in the taxpayer's interest for the Navy to render such an important and expensive decision at the very end of one presidential administration. The new administration and the Congress should have the opportunity to assess defense priorities in order to determine how best to address the defense budget's growing shortfalls.

It is my strong belief that no funds from any defense appropriation should be made available for the relocation, or planning for the relocation, of any nuclear-powered aircraft carrier away from Naval Station Norfolk, or for any homeporting of a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier at Naval Station Mayport, unless the Navy fully justifies such a move in a comprehensive report to the congressional defense committees.

Sincerely,



Jim Webb
United States Senator