



Congressional Hearing  
May 19, 2026

**Committee on Armed Services**

Job No. 1707612-001

1 TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON THE POSTURE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF THE  
2 NAVY IN REVIEW OF THE DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION REQUEST FOR  
3 FISCAL YEAR 2027 AND THE FUTURE YEARS DEFENSE PROGRAM  
4

5 Tuesday, May 19, 2026  
6

7 U.S. Senate  
8 Committee on Armed Services  
9 Washington, D.C.  
10

11 The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:45 a.m. in  
12 Room SD-G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Roger  
13 Wicker, chairman of the committee, presiding.

14 Committee Members Present: Senators Wicker  
15 [presiding], Fischer, Rounds, Sullivan, Scott, Budd, Banks,  
16 Moody, Reed, Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Hirono, Kaine,  
17 King, Peters, Rosen, and Kelly.  
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1           OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ROGER WICKER, U.S. SENATOR  
2 FROM MISSISSIPPI

3           Chairman Wicker: This morning, the committee meets to  
4 receive testimony on the posture of the Department of the  
5 Navy. I want to thank our witnesses; Acting Secretary of  
6 the Navy Hung Cao, Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Daryl  
7 Caudle, and Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Eric  
8 Smith, for being here, and for their distinguished service,  
9 and also for their testimony early in a classified session.

10          I want to begin by applauding President Trump's fiscal  
11 year 2027 budget request. It proposes \$65 billion for  
12 shipbuilding to buy 18 battle force ships and 16 support  
13 vessels. It builds directly on last year's substantial  
14 increase, including the funding from last year's  
15 reconciliation law, which jumpstarted procurement for  
16 support ships and unmanned naval vessels.

17          Previous shipbuilding plans were not based on realistic  
18 assumptions about industrial base growth and cost  
19 reductions. Those plans assumed a world at peace, not one  
20 that demands active deterrence. The can was kicked down the  
21 road instead of investing in American shipyards and workers.  
22 The statute -- the new statute requires a three -- well, let  
23 me put this -- for over a decade, the statute has required a  
24 355-ship fleet. This is the law signed by the President of  
25 the United States. But no plan over the last decade

1 succeeded, even though they promised to build a Navy with  
2 more than 300 ships. Today, we sit at just 291 ships in our  
3 fleet.

4 This budget changes that trajectory. Over the next 5  
5 years, it plans more than \$50 billion annually for battle  
6 force ships, a welcome change from the roughly \$30 billion  
7 we saw in past requests. \$50 billion versus \$30 billion.  
8 Congress has had to add funding every year since 2013 to  
9 make up for inadequate shipbuilding requests. I'm pleased  
10 that we may finally enter a period where the budget is  
11 adequate and realistic. This is the kind of leadership our  
12 Navy and our industrial base need. So, thank you and  
13 congratulations.

14 However, I must note some concerns. Current  
15 requirements dictate that we need the continuous presence of  
16 three amphibious readiness groups. Each should be built  
17 around a simple formation, one large-deck amphibious warfare  
18 ship, and two small deck ones. This plan does all it can  
19 over the next 5 years, but still leaves the fleet stuck  
20 around 31 amphibious ships. This still leaves us  
21 approximately nine ships short of the three amphibious  
22 readiness group requirement.

23 I'm also troubled about the reduction to just one  
24 destroyer per year. The reduction is coming just as we will  
25 begin retiring large surface combatants. Maybe I should say

1 the reduction would come if that stays the case just as we  
2 begin retiring large surface combatants, which we will do at  
3 an average rate of more than three per year over the coming  
4 decade, that math doesn't add up. The risk to our fleet is  
5 simply too high.

6       Regarding unmanned systems, the Navy's commitment is  
7 equally inadequate. Congress invested \$5 billion in  
8 unmanned maritime systems in last year's Defense  
9 Reconciliation Bill. In this shipbuilding plan, we see a  
10 desire to build unmanned vessels at scale, unmanned surface  
11 vessels at scale. However, we see zero funding for small  
12 vessels and the procurement of only 10 to 12 medium vessels  
13 annually. Our small and medium shipyards need much higher  
14 demand than that.

15       I'm also puzzled by the Department's failure to request  
16 funding for the nuclear sea-launched cruise missile program,  
17 despite explicit statutory direction to do so in last year's  
18 NDAA Bill passed by the House, passed by the Senate, signed  
19 by President Trump. As I told the Secretary of Energy,  
20 publicly last week, this is simply a matter of complying  
21 with the law. The United States cannot afford to forego  
22 credible, flexible response options while our adversaries'  
23 nuclear forces grow by the day.

24       Finally, we must address any move to outsource  
25 shipbuilding to foreign countries, whether modules or entire

1 hulls. I do not believe the American people favor such an  
2 approach. We've yet to see concrete details or proposals  
3 for the NDAA, and time is running short. I look forward to  
4 hearing from our witnesses on these issues. We must work  
5 together to grow the capacity of our Navy and our industrial  
6 base to deliver the best naval forces for the United States  
7 and our increasingly contested world.

8 As I mentioned earlier, my colleague, the ranking  
9 member, Senator Reed, has asked us to go ahead. He will  
10 submit his opening statement for the record.

11 [The information referred to follows:]

12 [COMMITTEE INSERT]

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1 Chairman Wicker: And we are now prepared to hear  
2 opening statements. Secretary Cao, you are recognized  
3 first, then let's take Admiral Caudle, and then General  
4 Smith.

5 Mr. Secretary, you're recognized.

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1           STATEMENT OF HONORABLE HUNG CAO, ACTING SECRETARY OF  
2 THE NAVY

3           Secretary Cao: Good morning, Chairman, Ranking Member,  
4 distinguished members of the Senate Armed Services  
5 Committee. Thank you for allowing me to testify before you  
6 today.

7           America's Sailors and Marines are currently on the  
8 front lines of freedom in operations to protect our  
9 Republic. Lincoln and Bush carrier strike groups and  
10 amphibious-ready groups with the 31st Marine Expeditionary  
11 Unit are in the Arabian Sea, protecting merchant ships and  
12 stopping illicit shipping by a terrorist regime. Destroyers  
13 Arleigh Burke, Oscar, Austin, Bulkeley, and Gonzalez are  
14 protecting our allies in the Mediterranean against cruise  
15 missiles from Iran. In the Caribbean, Iwo Jima ARG/MEU is  
16 stopping narco terrorists from poisoning Americans with  
17 illegal drugs. In the Pacific, Boxer ARG/MEU in destroyer  
18 Squadron 7 are enforcing the freedom of navigation in the  
19 South China Sea. At home, we're preparing Makin Island  
20 ARG/MEU and USS Dwight D. Eisenhower, a 49-year-old nuclear  
21 powered aircraft carrier, for deployment on the southern  
22 border. Our Sailors and Marines stand watch tonight saying:  
23 nothing will hurt you. Not on my watch.

24           Four weeks ago, I was tasked by President Trump to lead  
25 the United States Navy and the United States Marine Corps.

1 My three priorities are to take care of our Sailors and  
2 Marines, build ships, and protect our homeland. One hundred  
3 and twenty years ago, the Great White Fleet extended  
4 America's reach across the globe. We are currently at the  
5 forefront of history with a budget that will create the  
6 Golden Fleet, which renews that maritime dominance. We have  
7 the obligation to give our Sailors and Marines the very best  
8 equipment to do their jobs.

9 In our historic budget of \$377.5 billion, we're adding  
10 34 new ships and 5 unmanned ships. In 5 years, we will add  
11 122 manned and 63 unmanned ships. We will add 123 new  
12 aircrafts and 5 unmanned ships as well. We are funding the  
13 readiness of our fleet to 95 percent. We're procuring  
14 exquisite munitions that will keep our forces outside the  
15 weapon engagement zone, while investing in research and  
16 development for the fight of the future.

17 More importantly, we are increasing our service member  
18 pays, investing in family and unaccompanied housing, child  
19 development centers so that our Sailors and Marines have a  
20 safe, clean, and comfortable place to live and not have to  
21 worry about their families when deployed in harm's way. We  
22 have greatly exceeded recruiting and retention goals, and  
23 that is due solely to the sheer leadership of President  
24 Trump and Secretary Hegseth.

25 Two weeks ago, I was aboard USS Gerald R. Ford, USS

1 Winston Churchill, and USS Bainbridge as they're returning  
2 from the 11-month combat deployment in two theaters. Do not  
3 believe the fake news that claims food shortages, backed up  
4 toilets, and low morale. What I witnessed were motivated  
5 and professional young Americans pushing the boundaries of  
6 performance for their country.

7       It is imperative that we pass this budget. Ship  
8 construction and readiness with bill payers for Iraq and  
9 Afghanistan for 20 years. While industrial base atrophied,  
10 America's peer competitors grew stronger and threaten our  
11 sovereignty. Their 100-year plan has one goal: total global  
12 domination. But one thing standing in their way, and that  
13 is the United States of America. The Navy and Marine Corps  
14 are America's 911 force, capable of being anywhere as a  
15 carrier strike group or Marine air-ground task force with  
16 overwhelming firepower, as we saw in Absolute Resolve and  
17 Epic Fury.

18       A year ago, I testified in my confirmation before this  
19 body that it would create the most lethal Navy and Marine  
20 Corps team the world has ever seen. I will keep that  
21 promise having worn the cloth of our Nation for 32 years,  
22 most of which was in combat. I also do this because I will  
23 not allow my oldest son, who will be commissioned as a  
24 second lieutenant, United States Marine Corps, in 3 days to  
25 go to war the way I did without the equipment that we

1 needed. I will not allow this for any of America's sons and  
2 daughters. They signed a blank check to this Nation up to  
3 and including their lives, and we owe it to them to do our  
4 due diligence to fund a historic budget that will care for  
5 them and their families, while giving them all the tools  
6 that they need.

7 I have seen firsthand what Communism and authoritarian  
8 regimes have done to thriving Nations. Members of my family  
9 were murdered by Communists in 1975. We had no flag to send  
10 under or country to call our own, but the United States gave  
11 us hope and a future. I've dedicated my entire adult life  
12 to defend this Nation under God so that this would never  
13 happen to my children, your children, or our grandchildren.

14 Thank you again, Chairman, for your time and this  
15 opportunity to testify before you. I'm ready to answer your  
16 questions, sir.

17 [The prepared statement of Secretary Cao follows:]

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1 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Secretary Cao, and  
2 congratulations on your son. I think I know where you'll be  
3 3 days from now, and I'm sure you are as proud of him as I  
4 was to see my son commissioned some years ago. Admiral  
5 Caudle, your opening statement, sir.

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1           STATEMENT OF ADMIRAL DARYL L. CAUDLE, USN, CHIEF OF  
2 NAVAL OPERATIONS

3           Admiral Caudle: Good morning, Chairman Wicker, and  
4 Ranking Member Reed, and distinguished members of the  
5 committee. Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity  
6 to testify on the posture of the United States Navy. I'm  
7 honored to be joined by Acting Secretary of the Navy, Hung  
8 Cao, and my good friend, Eric, General Smith. We appreciate  
9 the committee's steadfast support for our Sailors, Marines,  
10 civilian workforce, and their families, as well as the  
11 resources you provide to defend our Nation.

12           This past year, our Navy celebrated 250 years of  
13 American seapower. Today, our Founding Fathers would  
14 scarcely recognize the modern fleet, ballistic missile  
15 submarines deterring strategic attack, nuclear-powered  
16 aircraft carriers projecting power across the globe, and an  
17 all-domain naval force delivering precision lethality at  
18 scale. And while the platforms have changed, one truth has  
19 not. The sailor remains our greatest competitive advantage  
20 and the heartbeat of our fleet. This July, our Nation's  
21 250th birthday, our Sailors will carry that legacy forward  
22 wherever our Nation requires presence, power, and resolve.

23           Since assuming the duties of the Chief of Naval  
24 Operations, I have been focused on one central objective:  
25 ensuring the Navy never loses its differentiated value. In

1 February, we released the United States Navy Fighting  
2 Instructions, which is designed to operate, operationalize  
3 my priorities a Foundry fleet, and fight and provide clear  
4 guidance on how we will build, generate, and employ naval  
5 combat power for the conflicts we must be prepared to win.  
6 These instructions reflect a simple reality: the Navy's  
7 value lies in our ability to generate decisive combat power  
8 from the sea with tailorable formations, sustain them  
9 forward and deliver lethal effects across every domain at  
10 the time and place of our choosing globally.

11       Operation Epic Fury is proving in real time what the  
12 Navy delivers forward persistent combat power from the sea.  
13 Sovereign options independent of basing, survivable and  
14 resilient under pressure and able to strike decisively.  
15 That is our differentiated value on full display. To  
16 preserve that advantage, we're executing a head strategy to  
17 ensure the fleet we build today is ready for the fight we  
18 face now, and adaptable and scalable to the one we will face  
19 tomorrow.

20       That strategy is realized through the Golden Fleet  
21 Initiative, a fleet design that blends high and lower end  
22 combatants, integrates robotic and autonomous systems, and  
23 enables scalable formations to outpace emerging threats.  
24 This approach increases our ability to scale, combat mass,  
25 distribute risk, and maintain escalation dominance against

1 the operational challenges our combatant commanders face  
2 globally. It also requires integrating technologies like  
3 artificial intelligence, advanced manufacturing, directed  
4 energy, and containerized systems as operational  
5 capabilities that expand our reach, persistence, and  
6 lethality across our kill chains and kill webs.

7 Our Fiscal Year 2027 budget request is strategy driven,  
8 and aligned to the Department of the Navy's priorities and  
9 the objectives of the National Defense Strategy, leveraging  
10 the concepts outlined in the United States Navy fighting  
11 instructions to ensure our investments directly strengthen  
12 the Foundry, the fleet, and the way we fight. It reflects  
13 disciplined choices to ensure we, first, always field a  
14 credible and highly effective sea-based strategic deterrent.  
15 And second, we invest in the right capabilities that  
16 preserve our warfighting advantage.

17 To do that, we focus on four priorities. Sailors  
18 first. Quality of service is not a luxury. It underwrites  
19 combat readiness and must always be our first priority.  
20 Second, the Foundry. The Foundry is where combat power is  
21 forged and we must not use it as a bill payer. A hollow  
22 family Foundry results in a hollow Navy. Third, the fleet.  
23 The fleet is our most flexible and decisive military  
24 instrument of national power. Therefore, we must build the  
25 right mix of forces to realize the Golden Fleet's full

1 potential through a smart application of the head strategy.  
2 And fourth, the fight. Winning will depend on the strength  
3 and adaptability of our kill chains and kill webs. From  
4 robust counter targeting, to leveraging new stealth  
5 technologies, to an abundance of longer-range munitions, to  
6 enhanced mission command, we must integrate and synchronize  
7 our capabilities seamlessly with our Joint Force teammates,  
8 our partners, and our allies.

9       It is the honor of my lifetime to serve as your Chief  
10 of Naval Operations. With your continued partnership, we  
11 will ensure the United States Navy remains the most capable,  
12 most ready, and most lethal maritime force in the world. I  
13 look forward to your questions, sir. Thank you.

14       [The prepared statement of Admiral Caudle follows:]

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1 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much for that  
2 statement. General Smith, you are recognized, sir.

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1           STATEMENT OF GENERAL ERIC M. SMITH, USMC, COMMANDANT  
2 OF THE MARINE CORPS

3           General Smith: Well, good morning, Chairman Wicker,  
4 ladies, and gentlemen. I'm honored to appear before you  
5 today alongside Acting Secretary Cao and Admiral Caudle, to  
6 represent your Marine Corps.

7           I'd like to start by recognizing the significance of  
8 this year's President's budget. It is a generational  
9 investment that supports the Marine Corps top four focus  
10 areas. One, restoring a 3.0 Amphibious Ready Group/Marine  
11 Expeditionary Unit presence. Two, setting the theater.  
12 Three, accelerating modernization and lethality. And four,  
13 building and sustaining a lethal force.

14           Restoring a 3.0 Amphibious Ready Group/Marine  
15 Expeditionary Unit presence is our North Star, so the thing  
16 that keeps me up at night. It consists of three  
17 continuously forward deployed Amphibious Ready Group/Marine  
18 Expeditionary Unit teams. One source in the East Coast, one  
19 from the West Coast, and one forward deployed from Okinawa,  
20 Japan, each embarked on three amphibious warships.

21           The ARG, the Amphibious Ready Group with Marine  
22 Expeditionary Units embarked is the most agile, versatile,  
23 and responsive formation of the Joint Force, hands down.  
24 It's how our Nation's leaders sustain forward posture, deter  
25 aggression, and respond to crisis or conflict across the

1 globe. Today, we have a 3.0 Amphibious Ready Group/Marine  
2 Expeditionary Unit presence and a strategic value is clear.  
3 The 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit is combating narco  
4 terrorism in the Caribbean, while the 31st Marine  
5 Expeditionary Unit, and the 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit  
6 are providing operational flexibility to maintain security  
7 and stability in the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific.

8 But this is not something we can sustain. We need to  
9 enhance our amphibious warship readiness and increase the  
10 size of our amphibious force. I want to extend my sincere  
11 appreciation to the Secretary of War, the Acting Secretary  
12 of the Navy, and my shipmate, Daryl Caudle, for their  
13 unwavering support towards our shared goal of restoring a  
14 3.0 Amphibious Ready/Group Marine Expeditionary Unit  
15 presence.

16 Our second focus area is setting the theater. We are  
17 committed to protecting our interests, deterring  
18 adversaries. Reassuring allies, and creating a more agile  
19 and resilient global sustainment network, one that  
20 seamlessly integrates with the Joint Force. To achieve  
21 this, we're ensuring an optimized force posture while also  
22 investing in lateral mobility, pre-positioning equipment and  
23 supplies, and digital manufacturing, and additive  
24 manufacturing, and enhanced installation resilience. We're  
25 refining our approach to logistics, prioritizing resilience,

1 speed, and adaptability to generate and sustain forces.

2 Our third area of focus is accelerating modernization  
3 and lethality. Force Design underpins everything that we  
4 do. We remain committed to modernizing everything from our  
5 Marine Expeditionary Units to our Marine Expeditionary  
6 Forces focusing on precision fires, air defense, unmanned  
7 systems, resilient command and control, and electromagnetic  
8 warfare. We're gaining momentum, but we have to accelerate  
9 to ensure our Marines are more lethal, survivable, and  
10 resilient.

11 And finally, we are building and sustaining a lethal  
12 force. The quality of life of Marines and their families  
13 directly impacts readiness, retention, and lethality. We're  
14 deliberately investing in Marines and their families to  
15 improve living conditions, institutionalize Marine Corps  
16 Total Fitness, and ensure support for family resources.

17 Before I close, I want to take a moment to recognize  
18 the members of this committee and other committees with  
19 jurisdiction over our national defense who will be retiring.  
20 On behalf of all Marines, we thank you. Thank you for your  
21 leadership, but most of all for your partnership. Your  
22 constant and steadfast support has ensured the readiness of  
23 your Marine Corps. We wish you the very best in the next  
24 chapter of your service. I'd like to close by stating your  
25 Marines are ready. Your Corps is a globally responsive,

1 lethal combined arms Naval Expeditionary Force that is  
2 capable of projecting power from sea to land and from land  
3 to sea, and to maneuver across multiple domains and  
4 contested environments to deter, deny, and defeat  
5 adversaries.

6 Thank you again for your trust and support, and I look  
7 forward to your questions.

8 [The prepared statement of General Smith follows:]

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1 Chairman Wicker: Secretary Cao, I'm sure you're very  
2 proud and pleased to be supported by the gentleman on your  
3 right and left. General Smith, you mentioned the 3.0.  
4 We're not going to be able to sustain that, are we?

5 General Smith: Sir, we will not.

6 Chairman Wicker: And so how soon will we be able to  
7 rectify that shortage?

8 General Smith: Well, sir, that's going to take years  
9 of steady, predictable funding from this body, from the  
10 Congress, to make sure that we have a sufficient amphibious  
11 force to meet a 3.0.

12 Chairman Wicker: Can you be more specific, though?

13 General Smith: Well, sir, what we have now is --

14 Chairman Wicker: We want you to tell to tell us what  
15 you need.

16 General Smith: Yes, sir. We have 31 amphibious now.  
17 We think the number is closer to 40.

18 Chairman Wicker: Okay. Well, again, thank you for  
19 identifying that, and just be aware that we want to help.  
20 Now, let's talk about unmanned systems, and I'll move to  
21 you, Admiral, and then maybe back to the General. The  
22 reconciliation bill last year invested \$5 billion to  
23 unmanned systems for the Navy, including \$2.1 billion for  
24 medium unmanned surface vehicles and \$1.5 billion for small  
25 unmanned surface vehicles. The Fiscal Year 2027

1 shipbuilding plan said the Navy is, "aggressively pursuing,"  
2 these unmanned systems, and has, "committed to build at  
3 scale." However, the budget has no funding for small USVs  
4 and procures between 10 and 12 manned USVs annually in  
5 future years at a cost of \$600 million to \$800 million. So,  
6 is there a gap between rhetoric for unmanned systems and the  
7 budget, Admiral?

8 Admiral Caudle: Sir, we -- I don't think so. You  
9 know, if you look back, Fiscal Year 2025, based on my notes  
10 here, we're talking about -- we bought about 360 small  
11 unmanned surface. And then in Fiscal Year 2026, we had  
12 about three times that that we bought. And then we dropped  
13 that back down in Fiscal Year 2027, and have, I think, in a  
14 smart way, prioritized, a significant amount of effort and  
15 funding toward our medium unmanned surface vessel.

16 From a Navy perspective, they take longer, they're  
17 significant. I can put containerized payloads on it, and  
18 we're all ahead flank on building those containerized  
19 payloads. Those range from deception to fires, to drone  
20 swarms, to towed array systems. And so, in the balance of  
21 what we're doing in the unmanned space between UAVs and  
22 USVs, I think we've looked hard at that balance and tried to  
23 get that right. Can additional funding do more in these  
24 small kinds of surface attack vessels? Sure, it could. But  
25 as you know, we discussed a bit in the classified session,

1 the concept of deployment there is still under development,  
2 and how we actually go bring that capability to bear is --

3 Chairman Wicker: You're saying we're not ready.

4 Admiral Caudle: -- something we're not ready.

5 Chairman Wicker: We're not ready to use that many  
6 small SUVs.

7 Admiral Caudle: We are always ready to launch them,  
8 and we are ready for them to go do their thing within the  
9 range that they would do that in, which is, you know, in the  
10 sustainment of how long they last at sea. But in the  
11 concept of employment against high end threats, our ability  
12 to actually have those staged and ready to be brought to  
13 bear from good, solid concepts of deployment, employment,  
14 and operations, we need more work to do there. And so,  
15 that's a command and control, and how we build that out.

16 You know, we have just stood up our USVRONs. We're  
17 just deploying our first MUSV with the Theodore Roosevelt  
18 Strike Group. So, in the ability to actually do this, the  
19 way we do it in the Navy in an effective and sustained way,  
20 we are still early in that stage.

21 Chairman Wicker: Okay. Let me move to General Smith.  
22 What's the Marine Corps planning to do with unmanned  
23 systems?

24 General Smith: Sir, we're primarily focused on small  
25 unmanned systems, small drones, swarming drones, using them

1 as munitions, as an extender of our infantry battalion's  
2 range. So, what we're looking at is with the small UAS  
3 having hand-thrown or man portable drones that can be used  
4 again as ammunition, so that I can extend the lethality and  
5 range of our infantry battalions. That's our primary focus  
6 on unmanned systems.

7 Chairman Wicker: Are there enough in the pipeline on  
8 the way for you at the moment?

9 General Smith: There are not, sir, we can't go fast  
10 enough. We've got to make sure that we don't get tied down  
11 to one manufacturer, that we were able to procure them from  
12 across the spectrum, because there are multiple companies  
13 who make a one-way --

14 Chairman Wicker: What needs to happen.

15 General Smith: -- attack drone.

16 Chairman Wicker: What needs to happen?

17 General Smith: Well, sir, frankly, we just have to get  
18 them -- get the budget that we need to procure them, and  
19 then go out and procure them without having all the red tape  
20 that we have had in the past, we don't have now, to get  
21 after procuring from multiple vendors without getting  
22 "vendor lock".

23 Chairman Wicker: Okay. We're going to need you to  
24 amplify that in your response to written questions.

25 General Smith: Sure.

1 Chairman Wicker: But thank you, both, and I appreciate  
2 your service. And to Reed, you are recognized. Welcome  
3 back.

4 Senator Reed: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And,  
5 gentlemen, thank you for your testimony, and also for your  
6 service to the Nation in many different capacities.

7 Secretary Cao, the latest update received from the  
8 Navy, about 2 weeks ago is that the contract negotiations  
9 for the Virginia block six boats, Fiscal Year 2025 to 1029,  
10 10 boats, and for the Columbia, build two boats from Fiscal  
11 Year 2026 to 2035 boats are very close to being finalized.  
12 What is the status of this contract? When will they be  
13 completed? Do you have an idea?

14 Secretary Cao: Thank you for the question. We're  
15 trying to accelerate the block buys and also accelerate the  
16 actual production of the submarines as well. That's why  
17 Vice Admiral Gautier, has been in charge of the diaphragm.  
18 So, everything's aligned underneath him. He has all the  
19 authorities and everything he needs in order to make these  
20 things happen and move the -- and accelerate the production  
21 to the left. And I will turn it over to Admiral Caudle to  
22 kind of tell you what our plan is for the accession of  
23 these.

24 Senator Reed: Thank you.

25 Admiral Caudle: Well, sir, I'll just tell you, we need

1 to get the contract done and -- but we want to make sure  
2 it's, you know, has the -- what's baked into it, the lessons  
3 we've learned on poor contracting strategies, that we've not  
4 always been in the right position to have the right  
5 oversight and the right incentives and the right mechanisms  
6 to ensure we get them delivered on time. So, there has been  
7 a thoughtful approach by the Secretary of War's team and the  
8 Navy team here under the PAE structure to actually get that  
9 right. I expect at any time, I can't give you the exact  
10 time, but it will be made and we're just making sure that we  
11 get that contract language correct, sir.

12 Senator Reed: Well, I appreciate that. I had an  
13 opportunity to go up to Quonset Point, and I believe it's  
14 retired Admiral McKee who was there, and he's doing a very  
15 good job. But the sooner we get the contract in, and the  
16 sooner the company can just keep proceeding ahead much more  
17 rapidly than before.

18 Admiral Caudle: Sir, I would just add, I mean, I won't  
19 take any more of your time, but it does add to our -- you  
20 know, our ability to actually execute our budget that we  
21 have from Fiscal Year 2026 and the One Big Beautiful Bill as  
22 well. So, it's tied to that. So, we're trying to get that  
23 done so that we have high execution numbers on both of  
24 those.

25 Senator Reed: Thank you, sir.

1 Another issue, Mr. Secretary, for the industrial base  
2 program, that's the supply chain, workers, all those things.  
3 The Navy's budget request is for \$788 million for the  
4 submarine industrial base in the discretionary category,  
5 which we will look at, but another \$205 million in the  
6 mandatory reconciliation column. And there's always an  
7 issue of whether or not the reconciliation will become  
8 reality. And what would happen to you if that \$205 million  
9 was not available.

10 Secretary Cao: Thank you again for that question.  
11 Ranking Member, this is why we need the whole bill. We need  
12 \$1.5 trillion for the Department of War, but also the -- and  
13 \$733.5 billion for United States -- the Department of the  
14 Navy, because we just can't -- I mean, we're prioritizing  
15 everything right now. And everything is a priority because  
16 we need unmanned systems, we need submarines, we need ships,  
17 we need we need auxiliary ships. We also need quality life  
18 for our Sailors and Marines. And this is why we need this  
19 whole bill, sir. Whether you pay it in one bill or two  
20 separate bills to us, we're agnostic to it. We just need to  
21 move forward, Senator.

22 Senator Reed: I know you're agnostic. You want the  
23 money, but I would kind of rate the possibility of getting  
24 the President's budget in some form through as higher than  
25 another reconciliation bill. And you might have to plan

1 for, accommodating that situation. It'd be worthwhile to do  
2 so.

3 Fleet readiness, Admiral Caudle, we talked about this  
4 in the closed session, but here in this open session, you  
5 always can do something to improve readiness, even in the  
6 calmest of moments. This is not one of them. So, can you  
7 give us an idea of the steps you're taking now?

8 Admiral Caudle: Well, sir, you know, readiness we look  
9 at across a typical acronym PESTO, which is people,  
10 equipment, our supply and sustainment, our training, and our  
11 ordinance. And this budget funds our readiness accounts to  
12 95 percent. That is incredible for a service chief. You  
13 know, I had to work very hard to figure out the puts and  
14 takes to get to that level, even though I love readiness.  
15 So, this is ship operating, call ship depot, our air  
16 operations, our sparing, paying our manpower bills, of  
17 course, in our ordinance.

18 And so, I think this budget goes a long way. It's  
19 generational in what it's trying to do to ensure we don't  
20 have a hollow Navy; we have a ready Navy. And so, there's  
21 been all types -- you know, there's all types of initiatives  
22 that we have from record recruiting to works we're doing  
23 with our vendors to ensure we're improving ordnance  
24 production to our force generation models to ensure they're  
25 actually delivering the Navy we can give our combatant

1 commanders. So, there's a lot in your question, but I'm  
2 very happy with the levels that we have baked into this  
3 budget.

4 Senator Reed: Very good. General Smith, I'll catch  
5 you on the second round, sir. Thank you.

6 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Reed. Senator  
7 Fischer.

8 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

9 Secretary Cao, I agree with the chairman's opening  
10 comments. I was disappointed to see that the Fiscal Year  
11 2027 budget did not include funding for SLCM-N. Our  
12 adversaries are not hesitating to expand their nuclear  
13 arsenals. The Navy must prioritize SLCM-N appropriately so  
14 that you can meet the statutory deployment date of 2032, and  
15 I am hopeful that this will be corrected.

16 Adam -- or Admiral -- I have an Adam at home. Admiral,  
17 how is the Navy working to accelerate delivery of the  
18 Columbia-class submarine program?

19 Admiral Caudle: Well, ma'am, first on SLCM-N. Ma'am,  
20 if I could, can I give you one sentence on that? You know,  
21 I'll look hard at this with Johnny Wolfe, because I knew  
22 this would come up. And Admiral Wolfe, and he has assured  
23 me that the money in the One Big, Beautiful Bill in the  
24 Fiscal Year 2026 budget, \$2 billion, is the right amount of  
25 money that we have currently that can be executed with

1 fiscal responsibility. So, he is -- I think Fiscal Year  
2 2028, you'll see an additional ask. But in the phasing of  
3 that money, that is what he thinks needs to be spent.

4 Senator Fischer: Admiral, my concern with that is not  
5 on your part, and it's not on Admiral Wolfe's part either.  
6 It is on the part of Congress where we seem bound and  
7 determined to move forward with continuing resolutions,  
8 which you and I both know is to the detriment of the defense  
9 of this country. And if the money is not put in a budget  
10 request and is not part of the appropriations process,  
11 you're behind the eight ball to begin with. You're behind  
12 that and not able to meet what is required of you when it  
13 comes to SLCM-N.

14 I want to make sure that the funding will be there, no  
15 matter how this Congress may act, and enable the Department  
16 and the Department of Navy to be able to meet their  
17 obligations under the law and for the defense of this  
18 country to give our combatant commanders the opportunity to  
19 present the President with the options that he needs. That  
20 is why I am requesting that. I going to be docked for all  
21 that time I just took.

22 Admiral Caudle: Senator, we're on the same page.

23 Chairman Fischer: Absolutely.

24 Senator Fischer: I know we are.

25 Admiral Caudle: We -- I mean, we want to deliver this,

1 so.

2 Senator Fischer: And I know you do, but I'm looking at  
3 the realities I face --

4 Admiral Caudle: Okay.

5 Senator Fischer: -- in the political world and what  
6 happens here in Congress. So, tell me what's happening with  
7 the Columbia.

8 Admiral Caudle: Columbia, you know, currently 18  
9 months off plan and working hard to get it delivered in  
10 2028. That's our goal. Of course, as we've talked about  
11 before, under, you know, new leadership on how we're putting  
12 heat and light on that project is with Admiral Gautier  
13 through director of submarine programs, dual hatted, the  
14 Under Secretary, and the PAE under Secretary Cao. So,  
15 leadership matters there, but also production matters.

16 And so, as you know, I visit up at Quonset Point, and  
17 of course, Electric Boat where all the super modules are now  
18 in place. And so, we're now in the final stages of putting  
19 those super modules together. And so, we're trying to knock  
20 down barriers that have historically prevented us from  
21 getting that done. Some things on new technologies that  
22 we're bringing to bear of how we're actually doing  
23 nondestructive testing in the off hours, how we're bringing  
24 in more robotic welding, how we're improving artificial  
25 intelligence utilization to improve workflows and management

1 of actual technical work documents.

2 So, there's a lot going on up at EB. Hiring is a big  
3 initiative to make sure the workforce is in place and the  
4 development of that workforce, to make sure we have no  
5 chinks in the armor to keeping those shifts rolling as we  
6 move forward on that delivery timeline.

7 Senator Fischer: That's good to hear. Can you give me  
8 an update on the Navy's efforts to extend the hulls of some  
9 of the Ohio-class submarines, especially given the delays  
10 we're seeing with the Columbia?

11 Admiral Caudle: I can. You know, what we're going to  
12 do is -- you know, we were looking at a number like between  
13 four and five of these PIRA, we call them, these pre-  
14 inactivation restricted availabilities. And now, the plan's  
15 changed a bit, and we're going to do one for sure. And we  
16 have confidence now because of the work we've done to look  
17 hard at the Ohio-class. What we will learn during that one  
18 will allow us to target any additional ones we need to do  
19 without necessarily having to do the PIRA. So, we're going  
20 to utilize the one to learn from that, and then scale that  
21 across the number we need to make sure we have a clean make  
22 before we break transition between Ohio and Columbia.

23 Senator Fischer: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

24 Chairman Wicker: Yes. Thank you very much, Senator  
25 King.

1           Senator King: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First,  
2 Secretary Cao, I want to also congratulate you on your son's  
3 commissioning. That's a that's a great story. You yourself  
4 are a great American story. I appreciate your presence here  
5 today.

6           I want to start with a I woke up about a month ago to  
7 one of the press conferences of Secretary Hegseth and,  
8 Admiral Caine -- General Caine, and General Caine said the  
9 following, I perked right up. "When we talk about an  
10 American destroyer, it's important that you and the American  
11 people understand their capabilities. An Arleigh Burke  
12 class. Destroyers are the backbone of the United States  
13 surface fleet." And this chart really illustrates that. If  
14 you can raise it up a little bit.

15           [Chart illustration.]

16           Senator King: When the fire bell rang in the Middle  
17 East, it was the destroyers that answered the call that are  
18 there. There are 11 now in in the vicinity of Iran, also in  
19 the Med, also in the Pacific. It's one of the most -- it is  
20 the backbone of the fleet. In fact, I don't have to assert  
21 that. That's what General Caine said. "These ships are  
22 armed to the teeth --" this is General Caine again -- "with  
23 surface to air missiles, land attack cruise missiles, anti-  
24 ship missiles, anti-submarine rockets, torpedoes, five-inch  
25 guns, extending the reach and capability of each and every

1 one of these destroyers."

2       What puzzles me is that the budget that's been  
3 submitted only requests one. And I just -- I don't really  
4 understand that. Particularly, as chairman pointed out,  
5 there are going to be retirements coming in the future. So,  
6 we're not even -- if there are three retirements and we're  
7 only building one a year, that's we're going into the hole.

8       Every hearing we've had in this committee for the past,  
9 I don't know, 6 months, has talked about rebuilding the  
10 industrial base. The only way to rebuild the industrial  
11 base is with consistent demand signals. You can't expect  
12 our private sector industrial base to make significant  
13 investments if they don't know where the next project is  
14 coming from, or if they're going to run out of work in a  
15 year or two and that's the situation that comes.

16       So, I hope you will reconsider the request for only one  
17 destroyer, as we've been doing it over the years. It's been  
18 three one year, two the next, three the next, and two after  
19 that. And I hope that we can return to the -- this is the  
20 year that should be three rather than one. So, Mr.  
21 Secretary, I hope you'll look carefully at that because  
22 we're talking about the backbone of the Navy here and these  
23 shipyards.

24       And, Admiral Caudle, you've been to bath. I thank you  
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Chairman Wicker: And also, let's put the chart which you just referred to in the record, also. Is there objection? Without objection, that's done.

[The information referred to follows:]

[COMMITTEE INSERT]

1           Senator King: The idea of building ships, building  
2 naval ships in a foreign shipyard I just don't understand,  
3 Admiral. Every stitch of clothing you have on is required  
4 to be made in the USA under the Berry Amendment. If we  
5 require our Sailors to wear shirts made in the USA, but  
6 their ships can be made abroad, that just doesn't make sense  
7 to me. So, I hope we can revisit this terrible idea of  
8 talking about building naval vessels abroad, both from a  
9 national security point of view, but also rebuilding the  
10 industrial base means providing the demand signal that will  
11 allow our industrial base to reconstitute itself, and to  
12 meet the demand that we're placing on them.

13           So, I appreciate your work on this, Admiral. I  
14 certainly appreciate you saw those incredible men and women  
15 at Bath that are doing, I think, building the most complex  
16 product in America, and we want to strengthen their ability  
17 to do that, their productivity. And that's happening.

18           So, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the time.

19           Chairman Wicker: Thank you for those comments, Senator  
20 King. Senator Budd.

21           Senator Budd: Thank you, Chairman. Thank you, all,  
22 for being here. Thank you for your service, and that of  
23 your teams behind you. Admiral Caudle, it's great to see  
24 another North Carolinian, North Forsyth High School, if I  
25 believe is correct.

1           So, a question for both you, Admiral Caudle, and  
2 General Smith as well. So, I visited DARPA last week, and I  
3 learned about their artificial blood program. So, what's  
4 the Navy doing to have enough blood on hand in the event of  
5 a large-scale operation or combat operations in the Pacific?  
6 We'll start with you, Admiral.

7           Admiral Caudle: Sir, I just visited DARPA myself not  
8 too long ago and got the maybe the same brief that you got  
9 on the initiatives there. This is FSHARP, this type of  
10 synthetic blood and synthetic platelets that they're working  
11 on. That is the keys to the kingdom on battlefield, you  
12 know, survivability, ensuring we can meet the golden hour  
13 across a vast Indo-Pacific.

14           So, synthetic blood products is something I'm very  
15 interested in. I don't think we have got it to a place in  
16 the -- from a perspective of fielding it where we should be.  
17 I know BUMED has worked on this. Probably, not with enough  
18 energy and effort. I know personally now the director of  
19 health agency, Department of Health Agency, Darin Via, knows  
20 about this program and knows how important it is. So, you  
21 have my commitment to look at this. And along with my good  
22 shipmate here, Eric Smith, it's important to keep his  
23 Marines alive as well, sir.

24           Senator Budd: Thank you for that, Admiral. General,  
25 that same question. But also, are there any policy or

1 research resourcing challenges that I can help with?

2 General Smith: Well, sir, on the on the room  
3 temperature, blood products. That's the Holy Grail of  
4 battlefield medicine. You know, when I was shot in 2004, I  
5 bled -- I came close to bleeding out. I was fortunate to be  
6 medevacked to a hospital in Baghdad and had five units of  
7 blood pumped into me. But had I had the ability to do room  
8 temperature blood products on the battlefield, I would have  
9 been in much better shape. I'm still here, but that is the  
10 Holy Grail of battlefield medicine.

11 Senator Budd: Thank you, both. Secretary Cao, General  
12 Smith, so I had the chance to see some of the Cherry Point  
13 F-35s a week or so ago, and I noted that their surface to  
14 air missile threat trainers on their range, they seem  
15 outdated to be able to replicate modern threats. So, what's  
16 the plan to modernize electronic warfare ranges at Cherry  
17 Point and all along the East Coast for our F-35s?

18 General Smith: Yes, sir. We're going to have to do  
19 that in simulators. We've got to increase our simulation,  
20 abilities, and our capabilities in those simulators.  
21 Because once we go into certain modes of the F-35, you're  
22 lighting up like a Christmas tree, and the overhead  
23 persistent SR by the PRC will pick that up very quickly.  
24 So, you know, my own aide, Colonel Shoup, call sign Putty,  
25 is an F-35 pilot and he can tell you that we have to do that

1 in simulation underneath closed doors. And we've got to get  
2 the money for the simulators. We've got to get them up to  
3 speed. We've got to get them to be able to replicate what  
4 an F-35 can do in in full mode.

5 Senator Budd: Thank you. General Smith, another  
6 question, about the Marine Raiders. So, MARSOC is  
7 authorized to have 3,337 billets. Yet, a recent  
8 congressional inquiry revealed that only 2,802 positions are  
9 filled. So, over 500 short. Are there any production or  
10 retention challenges, and how are you addressing it, and how  
11 can we help?

12 General Smith: Well, sir, I don't think there's  
13 actually anything we can do to help that. We're holding our  
14 standards high. Our attrition rate through the pipeline is  
15 something that I'm concerned with. I've got our MARSOC  
16 commander working mightily on that. We hold a very, very  
17 high standard for those MARSOC Marines. And so, what we've  
18 got to do is expand the input to make sure that people  
19 aren't afraid of the standard, if you will, they're not  
20 afraid of the Indoc to be able to get a higher percentage of  
21 people through that, because our standard is our standard.  
22 And I too am concerned about being able to fill the Raider  
23 ranks, but I'm also more concerned with being able to make  
24 sure the Raiders stay the Raiders.

25 Senator Budd: Thank you for that. Another question,

1 General. So, I'm concerned with the lack of counter-UAS  
2 systems at Cherry Point when I was down there recently,  
3 protecting our aircraft facilities and most importantly our  
4 people. That's a no-fail mission. So, how are we investing  
5 in delivering quickly to prevent an enemy drone strike on  
6 our bases?

7 General Smith: Well, sir, we're not going fast enough.  
8 There's multiple systems that we're investing in to get  
9 after a counter-UAS system. The small UAVs are our primary  
10 concern right now at our bases. Most of them are looky  
11 loos, people that are flying drones on their own. They  
12 happen to violate our airspace and we bring them down. But  
13 we've got to do better than drone defender and drone guns.  
14 And that is something that I'm working on.

15 We have not yet found the solution that is manned,  
16 portable enough to be useful both at an installation and in  
17 combat, because what I don't want to do is train my people  
18 up on multiple systems. I want to have a generic system  
19 that works both in garrison and in the field. It is  
20 something that we have not gone fast enough on. The  
21 solution is out there. We just haven't found it yet, sir.

22 Senator Budd: Thank you, all, Chairman.

23 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Budd. Senator  
24 Hirono.

25 Senator Hirono: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

1           This is for Secretary Cao and Admiral Caudle. The Navy  
2 spent \$70 million in planning and design funds over the last  
3 several years on Pearl Harbor new shipyard waterfront  
4 production facility, which was to go hand in hand with the  
5 new dry dock that is being built at the Pearl Harbor, and  
6 only to determine, after spending that much money recently  
7 to determine that the original site was cost prohibitive,  
8 which I believe was pretty obvious from the start, giving  
9 that it was planned to go on top of the current site of an  
10 existing dry dock. So, you know, \$70 million. I don't  
11 think it can be justified.

12           But on the -- I just want to ask both of you that, how  
13 is the Navy going to course correct and ensure that we will  
14 still achieve the optimization and efficiency gains  
15 originally envisioned under psyop. The idea was to have the  
16 production facility near the dry dock, but now, that's not  
17 going to happen. So, how are you going to ensure that the  
18 supplies that that will be needed to do the job on the dry  
19 dock will be nearby? Do you have a plan for that?

20           Secretary Cao: Senator, we're -- again, we need a  
21 forward staging area for repair. And again, the workers in  
22 Hawaii are probably some of the best shipyard workers --

23           Senator Hirono: Yes.

24           Secretary Cao: -- out there. And so, we need to make  
25 sure we have the right equipment and right facilities for

1 them. And this is why that study was there, to make sure  
2 that whether or not it was feasible, and we will definitely  
3 look at somewhere around there to make this happen, Senator.

4 Senator Hirono: I'm going to want to get a description  
5 of what you all intend to do to optimize the situation after  
6 spending \$70 million, which in my view, it can't be  
7 justified.

8 For Secretary Cao -- so you don't need to answer that  
9 particular question. I have another one for you, Secretary  
10 Cao. The DOD has a significant number of military  
11 construction projects on Guam, and I know you are familiar  
12 with the situation there. So, on Guam and Wake Islands.  
13 And for that, we need to continue to extend the H-2B visas.  
14 And we keep doing this in these short periods of time, and  
15 the current visa authorization expires in 2029. We're going  
16 to need to authorize an extension. So, I'd like to know if  
17 you would support extending the H-2B visas authority through  
18 2035.

19 Secretary Cao: Senator, Guam is near and dear to my  
20 heart. Right now as the confirmed Under Secretary Navy, I  
21 am the senior Defense official in Guam, which is kind of  
22 funny because 51 years ago, I landed in Guam as a refugee.  
23 So, that was my first taste of freedom in the world. But we  
24 do want to extend the H-2B visas. I've been working with  
25 your counterparts in the House in order to make this happen,

1 Senator, and I hope to have your support as well to push  
2 this through to.

3 Senator Hirono: To 2035?

4 Secretary Cao: Yes, Senator, around there, because it  
5 drives up the cost --

6 Senator Hirono: I think we need to create some  
7 stability here.

8 Secretary Cao: You're absolutely right, because it  
9 drives up the cost four times if we don't have the H-2B  
10 visa, Senator.

11 Senator Hirono: Exactly. Admiral and General Smith,  
12 do you agree?

13 Admiral Caudle: I agree wholeheartedly.

14 Senator Hirono: So, we can look for your support?

15 General Smith: Yes, ma'am.

16 Senator Hirono: So, I have a question about the  
17 condition of the airfield at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam,  
18 and the ramp at the airfield is in a state of disrepair.  
19 For example, 62 percent of parking spots there cannot  
20 support max weight C-17 aircraft. And given the Navy and  
21 Air Forces agreement on a 10-year repair schedule, I would  
22 just like to get your commitment, Admiral, that this  
23 agreement will be adhered to and that the Navy will adhere  
24 to the schedule of repairs on the ramps and execute the plan  
25 as agreed to with the Air Force.

1 Admiral Caudle: Senator, you have my full commitment  
2 on that.

3 Senator Hirono: It's a long time coming, and finally,  
4 there is an agreement. I think the Air Force would very  
5 much appreciate keeping to a schedule. There's been a lot  
6 of emphasis on the negotiation of several leases in Hawaii,  
7 and mainly that's involved the Navy. But for Admiral -- for  
8 the Army, rather -- and the Navy, though, has a very  
9 important lease in Kauai for the Pacific Missile Range  
10 facility, PMRF. And I'd like to get your commitment that  
11 you will continue to coordinate closely with the State and  
12 members of the public, particularly the Native Hawaiian  
13 community, in negotiating the lease at PMRF.

14 Admiral Caudle: My full commitment on that is a world  
15 class operation there. You have my full commitment.

16 Senator Hirono: Thank you very much.

17 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Hirono. Senator  
18 Scott.

19 Senator Scott: Thank you, Chairman.

20 First, I want to thank each of you for your service and  
21 all the men and women that work with you. General Smith,  
22 thanks for passing audits. I'm a business guy, so audits, I  
23 think are pretty big. So, I understand the importance of  
24 that. So, Acting Secretary, so what, you just got the job,  
25 so I'm sure you don't have a solution for everything, but

1 talk about what you need to do to be -- because the Navy has  
2 not been able to do theirs and the Marines have been able to  
3 do theirs. And so, you're on top of it. So, how are you  
4 going to get this done?

5 Secretary Cao: Senator, thank you so much for that  
6 question. As the under secretary, when I came in 7 months  
7 ago, I've been pushing hard for the clean audit. So, again,  
8 we made sure the Marine Corps met their third clean audit.  
9 And for the Navy, we are well ahead of schedule. I'm  
10 talking about months for the Working Capital Fund, and we're  
11 going to finish the General Fund next year. So, we will  
12 meet the deadlines or exceed the deadlines, make sure we do  
13 it ahead of time, Sir.

14 Senator Scott: Do you have from auditors, do you have  
15 a good list of exactly what you have to do?

16 Secretary Cao: Yes, Senator. We have a plan and  
17 milestones that we're meeting every single day. I mean,  
18 just everything from just even looking at the real estates  
19 and just quantifying the cost of the land and doing the  
20 inventory. We are well ahead of schedule, Senator.

21 Senator Scott: General Smith, you brought up the --  
22 your need for 40 or more amphibious ships to meet the  
23 requirements. So, Secretary, can you talk about, you know,  
24 how you're going to get that done and what's the plan to get  
25 that done? Because as far as I understand, it's still not

1 part of the Navy's plan to get the 40 amphibious ships. But  
2 can you talk about how you're going to get there?

3 Secretary Cao: Thank you, Senator. Yes, we have an  
4 Amphibious Forces Readiness Board that's chaired by the vice  
5 chief of Naval operations, as well as the assistant  
6 commandant of the Marine Corps. And they just submitted a  
7 report to me, which I forwarded to the Secretary of War  
8 yesterday, which plans out -- there's two courses of action  
9 and the course of action that we would like to pursue would  
10 be able to extend the offer to 56 months, allowing us to  
11 have two workup cycles, two integrated training cycles, as  
12 well as two deployments for every ship. So, for that, we  
13 would require 40 amphibious ships. Right now, we're at 31,  
14 and in the fit up right now we have one LPD per year and  
15 then an LH with a center of every 2 years in order to  
16 accomplish this.

17 Senator Scott: So, how long will it take to get there?

18 Secretary Cao: It will take prior to the end of the  
19 fit up, Senator.

20 Senator Scott: How many?

21 Secretary Cao: Until the future year development plan,  
22 which goes from 2028 to 2032. So, 2032, sir.

23 Senator Scott: Okay. All right. You took -- coming  
24 in, you and the prior Secretary took over a need to start  
25 building ships. Can you talk about what you're going to --

1 how you're going to change to start getting this done?  
2 Because the Navy's had a very difficult time to build ships  
3 on budget and on time. And so, talk about what the plan is  
4 to get there.

5 Secretary Cao: Yes, Senator, we are -- right now,  
6 there's 80 ships on contract and 59 in construction alone.  
7 And, you know, we're just not moving fast enough. It's  
8 taking about 6 to 8 years for us to develop a destroyer. We  
9 are looking at various ways to energize and induce, you  
10 know, more, I guess, competition to the industrial base.  
11 And this is I know we've been told earlier, hey, we're  
12 buying ships from overseas. We're not. We're looking at  
13 whether or not those ships are feasible to work inside our  
14 formation. And then what we're doing is having those  
15 foreign shipyards investing in the United States. We're  
16 going to create 540,000 jobs in order to get where we are  
17 right now in order to build ships. That includes pushing  
18 the supply chain and getting everything in the United States  
19 in order to make this happen, sir.

20 Again, it's not just about warships. We're talking  
21 about merchant ships as well. Right now, in the United  
22 States, there's only there's only 188 flagged commercial  
23 U.S. ships and 105 military Sealift Command ships. We need  
24 more than that. In fact, the Chinese right now have 11,000  
25 merchant ships out there, and we are a maritime Nation that

1 borders on the Atlantic and Pacific, and we require this in  
2 order to thrive as a Nation.

3 Senator Scott: Sir, why can't you design a ship in six  
4 months? I mean, it just it doesn't make sense to me that if  
5 you got everybody in a room -- I mean, I've built a lot of  
6 stuff in my life, and I've not built a ship, but you just  
7 get everybody in a room and make a decision. And the way  
8 I've always thought about it is we shouldn't be buying, you  
9 know, expensive stuff, but we should buy what we exactly  
10 need and quit changing it. So, I don't -- it doesn't make  
11 sense to me.

12 Chairman Wicker: So, take the time to answer that  
13 question, Mr. Secretary.

14 Secretary Cao: You're absolutely right, Senator. And  
15 this is exactly why we need the Golden Fleet, which goes  
16 from small to large combatants. The small combatants are --  
17 we're investing in a ship that's already been planned and  
18 built right now, which is the national security cutter.  
19 It's already out there and it's proven. So, we would  
20 commission this ship and build it and then and put Mark 70  
21 launchers on there. So, it's basically containerized  
22 system.

23 So, you know, the hardest thing we have in warfare is  
24 the vertical launch system, the replenishment at sea. We've  
25 been trying that for years. But in containerized systems,

1 you're able to pull in any port. And using gantry cranes,  
2 you can pull those containers on and off quickly. And so,  
3 this is why we need the low to high mix of ships because I  
4 can't have a destroyer do everything like, for example, the  
5 missions down in South America or even, you know, escorts as  
6 well. I hope that answers your question, Senator.

7 Chairman Wicker: Thank you.

8 Senator Scott: I just wanted to -- 6 months is a good  
9 time to get it all designed.

10 Secretary Cao: Yes, sir.

11 Chairman Wicker: You may want to follow-up with a  
12 question on the record, Senator Scott. Senator Rosen.

13 Senator Rosen: Well, thank you, Chairman Wicker,  
14 Ranking Member Reed, for holding this hearing. And I'd like  
15 to thank the witnesses for testifying today and for your  
16 service to this country. We appreciate you.

17 And I want to talk a little bit about Fallon Naval Air  
18 Station and Modernization. I see you know a lot about it.  
19 So, Secretary Cao and Admiral Caudle, Nevada -- I'm going to  
20 tell everyone who doesn't know here, Nevada is proud to host  
21 Naval Air Station Fallon. Yes, we have a naval base in  
22 Nevada. We are proudly home to Top Gun, our Nation's  
23 premier carrier, air wing, and SEAL training centers, among  
24 other things.

25 And as you well know, the Nevada delegation has worked

1 closely with the Navy, Federal agencies, tribal governments,  
2 and local stakeholders for years to secure the Fallon Range  
3 Training Complex Modernization in Fiscal Year 2023 NDAA,  
4 expanding the range by over 600,000 acres to meet critical  
5 national security training needs. So, now, we're nearly 4  
6 years into the modernization effort, and I've made it clear  
7 each time that Navy leadership has come before the committee  
8 that as part of the deal you struck in 2022, you have to  
9 fully, completely compensate those grazing permit holders  
10 for their lifetime loss because the payments offered to the  
11 ranchers and the B-16 range complex completely it's missing  
12 the mark.

13       The 2-year clock for payments to the ranchers on the B-  
14 17 range has already begun. So, we just have to get this  
15 right. You have to get this right. I'm disappointed  
16 there's still significant discrepancies in valuing the  
17 permanent loss of forage and considering the loans that the  
18 permittee must repay because permit grazers losses should be  
19 treated as a complete loss, it's not a buyout. And in many  
20 cases, in Nevada, these are multi-generational families.  
21 They've just been there forever, and they're giving up not  
22 just the grazing rights, their livelihood, and what their  
23 family's done for generation after generation, and they're  
24 giving it up in service to our country. And so, these  
25 Nevadans have kept up their side of the bargain, and we have

1 to do what's necessary for our Aviators and SEAL teams. As  
2 you know, Mr. Secretary, the best training is in a realistic  
3 environment. So, now, it's the Navy's turn.

4 So, Mr. Secretary, and Admiral Caudle, tell us, how is  
5 the Navy reviewed and reassessed payment offers based on the  
6 latest input the team in Northern Nevada has received to  
7 ensure every single permittee is made whole in this process?

8 Secretary Cao: Well, Senator, if I can just take 2  
9 seconds to brag about Fallon, because I've spent --

10 Senator Rosen: Please.

11 Secretary Cao: -- a lot of time there clearing there.  
12 That was built in World War II when we had to fight two  
13 right sides, and we didn't know if we were going to -- if we  
14 had to give up one side, we would basically give up the  
15 Pacific, and fight the Atlantic and use bases like Fallon on  
16 the other side mountain to do a counterattack to take back  
17 California. So, that's really the history of the base. And  
18 right now, every single carrier air wing goes out there to  
19 train to go out there. That's how we're able to do Epic  
20 Fury and Absolute Resolve so well because of the training  
21 ranges there.

22 Again, Fallon has done a lot of things over the years.  
23 I remember back in the days we put the solar panels all  
24 around the bases in order to pay back to the city to export  
25 the energy out there. We have been in negotiations with the

1 ranchers. And again, I have a fiduciary responsibility also  
2 to the United States Navy to make sure we get the best deal  
3 for us as well, and we are -- I would love to come out there  
4 and visit the base one more time again. I love riding  
5 around the ATVs, slapping C-4 on those -- all those  
6 unexploded munitions and blow them up. But I'll go out  
7 there with you, Senator, and we'll --

8 Senator Rosen: Perfect. So, we have a whole bunch of  
9 other things. I'm going to have the admiral speak to this,  
10 too, but we have other roads out there that have to be moved  
11 around. We have some flooding issues on the B-16 range.  
12 So, I welcome you to come to my office and we can discuss it  
13 in length. You know it well, and we can get go moving  
14 forward. Please, Admiral.

15 Admiral Caudle: Well, Senator, you know, we've talked  
16 I'm committed to doing what's right by the ranchers there.  
17 I want to but, you know, these things are delicate and  
18 they've got both sides. And there's rubrics on how we  
19 evaluate these things. And there's escrow accounts and all  
20 these things that are going on from really outside my lane.  
21 But you have my full support on the importance of filing.  
22 It goes without saying. I mean, we have worked very hard  
23 there to deliver a lot of quality-of-service improvement  
24 there. The housing there is a challenge, and, you know,  
25 over -- I think it's 172 military homes that need to be, you

1 know, completed there.

2 Senator Rosen: And we need even more than that. We  
3 need infrastructure as well.

4 Admiral Caudle: The demand is outstripping our supply.  
5 Yes, ma'am.

6 Senator Rosen: Yeah. Because our men and women who  
7 work out there and their families, they're having to live an  
8 hour away in Reno where housing is already short. So,  
9 there's a lot to do. I would love for you to come talk with  
10 my team, and we can review that, and continue to move  
11 forward and keep falling as amazing place as it is.

12 Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

13 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Rosen. There's a  
14 vote going on the floor, but I think we can conclude within  
15 time. Senator Banks, you are recognized.

16 Senator Banks: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

17 Admiral Caudle, Secretary Cao, I want to start by  
18 thanking both of you for your decision to assign a one-star  
19 reserve flag officer at Crane Navy Base in Indiana by the  
20 end of the fiscal year. This is a really big deal for  
21 Indiana, for Crane, and I think for the country, and a game-  
22 changing moment for Crane to help accelerate and field SLCM-  
23 N and CPS can. Secretary Cao, can you elaborate for a  
24 minute on the strategic importance of this move?

25 Secretary Cao: Thank you, Senator, for the question.

1 Again, this is so important to us. I mean, Conventional  
2 Prompt Strike, a missile they can't stop, that can go from  
3 here to California in 16 seconds, be launched from a ship  
4 like the USS Zumwalt, that can't be seen from the air or on  
5 -- I mean, this is exactly what we need or from a submarine.  
6 And as well as SLCM-N and we talked about before, having the  
7 strategy of having SLCM-N on a submarine. So, instead of 14  
8 ballistic missile submarines, we add the other 48 fast  
9 attack submarines as part of the arsenal for strategic  
10 strikes as well. And the only way to make this, to  
11 accelerate this program, make it go faster, is to put an  
12 admiral up there that will have oversight of this program,  
13 sir.

14 Senator Banks: Admiral, anything to add? How is this  
15 good for the Navy, sir?

16 Admiral Caudle: You know, first of all, thank you for  
17 your persistent leadership on advocating for Crane. It is  
18 a, you know, one-of-a-kind facility out there that does  
19 things for SLCM-N and CPS, as we've discussed. But missile  
20 electronics, radar, electronics, systems integration, the  
21 launch systems that we have to do to launch SLCM-N and  
22 launch CPS, all of that technology is at the heart of  
23 Crane's operation. And so, you know what? Putting flag  
24 leadership out there really gives an opportunity, I think,  
25 to go quicker a bit, the command-and-control structure of

1 how that's being overseen. So, while the first step has  
2 been done to commit to the new flag officer, there's work to  
3 be done to go land on what that organizational structure can  
4 be in the future to be most effective.

5 Senator Banks: Secretary, can you talk for a moment  
6 about Secretary Hegseth, President Trump and your vision to  
7 move more program offices closer to where the programs are  
8 administered not just in this case at Crane, but across the  
9 board. How is this good for the Navy?

10 Secretary Cao: Senator, again, you can't -- you know,  
11 it's one of those things: leadership by presence. You  
12 actually have to walk around and be there. And it's just  
13 hard to fly around. You know, not everybody has a  
14 Gulfstream or something like that to fly around. So, it's  
15 best to have them right there at the production site the  
16 same way we have Rob Gaucher just to look at, you know, ship  
17 production, nuclear aircraft carriers, nuclear submarines.  
18 This is why we have to have leaders right where they are to  
19 motivate and push industry, and push our civilians, too.

20 Senator Banks: Thank you.

21 I want to thank you, too, Mr. Secretary, for your  
22 leadership in deploying ShipOS throughout the country. Ship  
23 OS is exactly the kind of modern AI-enabled software  
24 infrastructure that our shipbuilding industrial base needs.  
25 What is your vision for scaling ShipOS across the fleet,

1 beyond submarines and the broader shipyard enterprise.

2 Secretary Cao: Senator, you know, the fact that we're  
3 still going on clipboards and Excel spreadsheets, and  
4 forming going down the line going, okay, I need two guys  
5 that can weld today. Okay. Hung and Jim and like, okay,  
6 but we need somebody to do the gas reengineering. So, it  
7 just doesn't work that way. It's just best to use these AI  
8 systems in order to drive efficiencies and streamline  
9 processes so we can get our ships out in time, so we can get  
10 our destroyers out faster than 6 to 8 years. We need to  
11 develop them within 2 years because our fleet needs it and  
12 our country needs it.

13 Senator Banks: Sir, I know you're hitting the ground  
14 running and, new in the acting role and hopefully, in the  
15 permanent role soon. But what's been the holdup? We funded  
16 ShipOS in the Big Beautiful Bill. Well, over a it was a  
17 year ago. What's the holdup? What's taken so long? What  
18 are the obstacles with, with, with fully, accelerating the  
19 expansion of ShipOS.

20 Secretary Cao: Well, sir, a lot of that money I know  
21 you funded a year ago. We just got the money, and right  
22 now, I know that we're at 19 percent execution, but by the  
23 end of the July, we'll be at 63 percent execution for all  
24 the money that we process. And by September, we'll be at 98  
25 percent. So, it's just a matter of getting the money in

1 time and on time. And this is why, you know, shutdowns and  
2 continuing resolutions don't help us because it just delays  
3 everything. It's the accordion effect. It's like when  
4 you're running in formation, you know, one person speeds up  
5 and slows down. It just causes that. Exactly why we need  
6 this bill, the full bill, in order to pay for it and really  
7 take care of the Navy and Marine Corps, sir.

8 Chairman Wicker: Thank you for your leadership --

9 Admiral Caudle: Senator, if I could just add one -- I  
10 think one thing that's key to this, too is, the Palantir  
11 system has to tap authoritative data sources, and those  
12 things are disparate. They're just all over the map on our  
13 data strategy. So, getting the connections to the data  
14 sources that we can rely on so that we can see ourselves  
15 through these types of AI technologies has been a limb fog,  
16 but we're moving out at speed, just like the Secretary said.

17 Senator Banks: That's helpful. Thank you. I yield  
18 back.

19 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Banks. Senator  
20 Caine.

21 Senator Caine: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And to our Navy  
22 and Marine. And to the committee, a compliment on the  
23 timing of this hearing. President's budget first,  
24 shipbuilding plan to a second hearing, third, I love that  
25 order. In past years, we've sometimes done the posture

1 hearing before we had the budget or before we had the  
2 shipbuilding plan, but this year, we've timed it right,  
3 which means that we can do work we need to do.

4 Secretary Cao, I'm going to ask you a question that I  
5 hadn't intended to ask, but in your in your verbal  
6 testimony, you said something that perked my ears up because  
7 I didn't remember it from your written testimony, and I went  
8 back and looked at the written testimony. And I think you  
9 added something you were talking about deploying recently  
10 with the Ford Carrier Strike Group and how proud you are and  
11 we are of their service. And then you use this line, "Do  
12 not believe the fake news that claims food shortages, backed  
13 up toilets and low morale."

14 And my ears perked up at that. Particularly, the  
15 subject of backed up toilets. It has been widely reported  
16 by the Navy Times and the Military Times by BBC and NPR that  
17 there was a problem of backed up toilets on the Ford. It  
18 had actually been predicted in a GAO report that was done in  
19 2020, that the design of the plumbing system on the Ford was  
20 insufficient for 4,000 Sailors and could lead to problems.  
21 And we also have a lot of constituents in Virginia who are  
22 connected to the Ford, and we've heard this from  
23 constituents.

24 Are you saying -- and if I could, Mr. Chair, I'd like  
25 to introduce one of the articles for the record. The Navy

1 Times, "The Navy's largest ship, continued to be plagued by  
2 plumbing issues," dated January, 2026.

3 Chairman Wicker: Without objection.

4 [The information referred to follows:]

5 [COMMITTEE INSERT]

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1 Senator Caine: Are you saying that these public  
2 reports, and our constituents, and the GAO report are lies?

3 Secretary Cao: Senator, in my years in the Navy, it  
4 wouldn't be a sea story if there wasn't some embellishment  
5 again, with the food and stuff like that. I mean, we -- I  
6 was serving these guys food and there's a lot of --

7 Senator Caine: Backed up toilets.

8 Secretary Cao: Backed up toilets. The commanding  
9 officer did show me the backed-up toilets. It's actually  
10 next to the where the fire was. So, it's -- it hasn't  
11 backed up since, but it's just we have finished this stuff,  
12 but Admiral Caudle wants to comment on some of these.

13 Senator Caine: I'd like him to, but I just want to  
14 say, if somebody tells me that something that is in the  
15 record as true is fake news, that's essentially telling me  
16 that it's a lie and it raises honest issues. But it raises  
17 another issue when somebody says a problem is fake news,  
18 then that makes me think they're not going to fix the  
19 problem because they're denying the problem now. Admiral,  
20 are we taking steps with respect to the fort and other ships  
21 in that category to make sure that the plumbing system is  
22 sufficient for the needs of Sailors deployed?

23 Admiral Caudle: Of course, sir. I think what the  
24 Secretary is trying to get across is, you know, it's not a  
25 binary state on calling out the article. It's to what

1 extent? Five thousand Sailors a day flush the commode at  
2 least four times a day, at least, over a 10-month  
3 deployment, which is what -- you know, this went a little  
4 bit into almost 11, exactly. That's six million flushes.  
5 That's a lot of flushes. So, this is a less than a 1  
6 percent problem. Now, it's a significant problem when the  
7 heads are down, but the time between somebody's flushing a  
8 t-shirt in there, a rag in there, something else in there  
9 that's not supposed to be by our procedure till it was up  
10 again is like a couple hours type of thing.

11 Senator Caine: Let me say it this way. The reports  
12 that I've read, including the one I put into the record, the  
13 Navy acknowledged that it's a problem they're working on.  
14 The Navy did not say this is fake news or a lie. They  
15 acknowledged that it was a problem. What is being done  
16 right now with respect to future deployments to make sure  
17 that the plumbing systems on these Ford-class are  
18 sufficient?

19 Admiral Caudle: I think the plumbing system on the  
20 Ford-class is a good design. We went away from a gravity  
21 drain and normal flushing-type system to a vacuum --

22 Senator Caine: Is there any current effort to do any  
23 improvement? Are you 100 percent satisfied with this?

24 Admiral Caudle: No. I think it's -- I'd have to check  
25 on the specifics of whether or not there's a lymph act in

1 the volume of certain piping systems that allow a Sailor to  
2 do something wrong and clog it and take it down and put it  
3 out of commission that I could go improve upon. If that  
4 system is operated in accordance with procedure, then it  
5 does not clog.

6 Senator Caine: So, would you say that the reports of  
7 backed up toilets are fake news. Would you use that phrase?

8 Admiral Caudle: I would say that they're highly  
9 exaggerated.

10 Senator Caine: That's okay. That's what you would  
11 say. Two last points that I'll just make as points. One,  
12 250,000 civilians in the Navy. No proposal for a pay raise  
13 for civilians. There's a bonus pool, but good proposals for  
14 pay raises for Sailors, as there should be. We'll support  
15 that. I worry about the message it sends when we're  
16 increasing the budget from 800 billion to 1.5, when there's  
17 zero proposal for pay raise for Navy civilians. I'll have  
18 other questions for the record, but I yield back.

19 Senator Caine: Admiral Caudle, is there more of a  
20 problem on the backed-up toilets than usual? I think that's  
21 the question.

22 Admiral Caudle: I think Ford has a newly designed  
23 system. It does require a tighter adherence to misuse where  
24 we would find routinely, you know, underwear, t-shirts,  
25 large rags in our sanitary tanks, because the previous

1 system would let that go through. It is more susceptible to  
2 misuse like an airplane's vacuum drying system. So, whether  
3 or not, you know, I can put things in that Sailor proof that  
4 I need to talk to the design engineers. But I would say the  
5 fact that the time it's offline, sir, from the time it clogs  
6 to offline is a less than 1 percent problem of its overall  
7 use.

8 Chairman Wicker: Is it fair to say that your testimony  
9 is that most of the problem resulted from misuse?

10 Admiral Caudle: There's no question. To the extent we  
11 actually started standing a watch in our heads to ensure  
12 people complied with the procedures to keep it from being  
13 misused. So, the system is, again, a vacuum drying system.  
14 And whether or not that's robust enough for Sailors, I can  
15 look at.

16 Chairman Wicker: Oh, okay. Very, very good. Thank  
17 you for that clarification. And I'm sure there'll be some  
18 more discussion there. Senator Moody, I believe you're  
19 next.

20 Senator Moody: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Acting  
21 Secretary Cao, Admiral Caudle, and General Smith, thank you  
22 for being here today. And thank you to everyone sitting  
23 here that wears a uniform for answering the call and  
24 choosing service as your profession. I greatly respect you  
25 for making that choice in your life. Thank you very much,

1 and the American people thank you.

2 As you know, Florida is home to several naval  
3 installations, including Naval Air Station, Pensacola,  
4 Mayport, Jacksonville, Key West, many more support offices  
5 across our state. When the average American and I think  
6 many watch these hearings, these open hearings, they think  
7 of the Navy. The first thing that comes to mind are  
8 submarines or carrier strike groups. Oftentimes, people  
9 forget the platforms needed to support the Navy's missions  
10 across the globe.

11 Without proper testing of future systems and  
12 prototypes, the Navy cannot innovate at a pace it needs to  
13 deter our adversaries. In fact, in many of these hearings,  
14 many sitting in those chairs will say, we have to  
15 reconfigure how we do things from procurement to training to  
16 keep pace with innovation. So, we're strategically  
17 outpacing our adversaries. The Eglin Gulf Test and Training  
18 Range plays a vitally important role in that mission. It  
19 supports the testing and evaluation of weapons systems,  
20 unmanned surface and underwater vehicles, hypersonic  
21 platforms, and a wide range of other capabilities that the  
22 fleet depends on. At 180,000 square miles of controlled  
23 airspace stretching from Key West to North Florida, the  
24 Eglin Range is the largest test and training range in the  
25 continental United States, and the Department of War has

1 identified it as a national military asset that cannot be  
2 replicated anywhere else in the country, from hypersonic  
3 weapons testing, to unmanned systems development, to live  
4 fire evaluation. The work being done on that range directly  
5 shapes the lethality of the future Navy, and I would argue  
6 the future success of our military

7       Admiral Caudle, I'd like to start with you and give you  
8 an opportunity to speak on the record about the importance  
9 of that range, the Eglin Gulf Test and Training Range to the  
10 Navy. From your perspective as Chief of Naval Operations,  
11 how critical is the range to the Navy's testing,  
12 development, and modernization efforts? Specifically, what  
13 does that range contribute to the Navy that the service  
14 could not get or could not get as effectively from any other  
15 location in the country?

16       Admiral Caudle: Well, Senator, thank you. I mean,  
17 you're like pushing an open door here from -- you know, on  
18 this question. You know, with the 96th Test Wing that's  
19 there, the joint integration we do with the Air Force,  
20 they're collaborative platforms there. We have F-35 Charlie  
21 training, their EOD school weapons testing. As you've laid  
22 out, all of those things are significantly important to the  
23 United States Navy. It's we have a lot of joint integration  
24 that's done there. And so, Eglin serves a very vital role  
25 in everything you laid out toward our gaining lethality.

1           Senator Moody: And as you look to where the Navy is  
2 going, and certainly we can look at conflicts that have just  
3 recently happened, how important the Navy is, unmanned  
4 systems, hypersonics, advanced munitions, distributed  
5 maritime operations, how essential is preserving the full  
6 footprint of that range to delivering those capabilities to  
7 the fleet?

8           Admiral Caudle: Well, like you said, it's a national  
9 asset. So, when you start shrinking these types of ranges  
10 down and I don't get the ability to conduct full range  
11 maneuvers of these at very advanced systems, then you're  
12 going to limit me somehow to do real-world testing and  
13 result mostly to simulation, which doesn't completely give  
14 us the full answer on our capabilities.

15          Senator Moody: And I want to just shift over to Acting  
16 Secretary Cao, shifting from capability to policy. As you  
17 know, since 1983 and codified by the Gulf of Mexico Energy  
18 Security Act in 2006, the military mission line has served  
19 as the boundary, protecting the range from encroachment by  
20 offshore drilling or oil and gas activity that is  
21 fundamentally incompatible with military testing and  
22 training. The Pentagon itself reaffirmed this position in  
23 its May 2018 report to Congress, and I'll quote it was  
24 titled, "Preserving Military Readiness in the Eastern Gulf  
25 of Mexico."

1           And in that report, the Department stated, "If oil and  
2 gas development were to extend east of the MML without  
3 sufficient surface limiting stipulations and/or oil and gas  
4 activity restrictions mutually agreed by the DoD and DOI,  
5 military flexibility in the region would be lost and the  
6 test and training activities would be severely affected.  
7 This result would be less capable and less prepared military  
8 force. This outcome would be in direct conflict with the  
9 National Defense Strategy."

10           So, if that's the Department's own assessment, and the  
11 strategic environment has only sharpened since 2018. Even  
12 if you fully support American dominance and energy and  
13 exploring all of the available resources to support that  
14 mission, how important is it that we maintain and preserve  
15 that MML and that that that testing range?

16           Secretary Cao: Again, Senator, I spent 5 years of my  
17 career in the Panhandle, some of it in Eglin. There's no  
18 other place. And also in industry, we did a lot of counter  
19 U.S. signals. I mean, there's an unfederated EW range that  
20 we can do a lot of testing facilitating there. So, yes,  
21 Eglin is extremely important to the United States Navy and  
22 to our mission.

23           Senator Moody: And preserving that testing range is  
24 incredibly important to the future of the Nation.

25           Secretary Cao: Yes, Senator.

1 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Moody. Senator  
2 Kelly.

3 Senator Kelly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4 Mr. Secretary, I want to discuss how we revitalize our  
5 maritime industrial base. So, the Navy's shipbuilding  
6 delays, maintenance backlogs, and workforce shortages are  
7 not isolated problems. They're symptoms of a broader  
8 decline in U.S. shipbuilding capacity that has developed  
9 over decades. Meanwhile, China has built a massive maritime  
10 industrial base by linking commercial shipbuilding, and  
11 naval shipbuilding, and naval production together.

12 I want to start out with just some basic questions, yes  
13 or no? Would you agree that the source of many of the  
14 Navy's challenges delivering new warships on time and on  
15 budget are due to a weakened shipbuilding industrial base?

16 Secretary Cao: Yes, sir.

17 Senator Kelly: Would you agree that looking at the  
18 other great shipbuilding powers in the world today, Korea,  
19 Japan, China, even the Europeans, their shipyards benefit  
20 from having business from both commercial ship owners and  
21 military shipbuilding orders?

22 Secretary Cao: Yes, sir.

23 Senator Kelly: So, would you agree that the US would  
24 benefit from having a viable market for U.S. built  
25 commercial vessels, especially since that would mean having

1 a resilient supply chain that can support both commercial  
2 and military shipbuilding?

3 Secretary Cao: Yes, sir. As I said earlier, I mean,  
4 we only have 188 commercial flagged U.S. ships and 105  
5 military sealift command ships, and we need thousands, the  
6 way the Chinese have.

7 Senator Kelly: Would you agree that in a major  
8 conflict, the United States military depends heavily on  
9 commercial sealift capacity to move fuel, equipment,  
10 ammunition and supplies overseas.

11 Secretary Cao: Senator, logistics wins wars.

12 Senator Kelly: And would you agree that our current  
13 sealift fleet is aging in the United States, lacks  
14 sufficient domestic shipbuilding Capacity to recapitalize  
15 that fleet quickly.

16 Secretary Cao: Yes, sir. It's not just the number of  
17 ships. We also need merchant mariners as well. I mean,  
18 that's why we need to push U.S. Merchant Marine Academy. We  
19 need to push Maine Maritime Academy, Massachusetts, New York  
20 Maritime, all those avenues in order to get more merchant  
21 mariners out there.

22 Senator Kelly: Thank you for that. As a graduate of  
23 the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, I appreciate that.

24 Secretary Cao: I wasn't trying to placate you, but I  
25 guess I want something.

1           Senator Kelly: Would you also agree that in a  
2 prolonged conflict in the Indo-Pacific, we can't assume  
3 foreign shipyards or foreign controlled shipping networks  
4 will remain fully available to the United States?

5           Secretary Cao: Well, Senator, I think I know where  
6 you're going with this. We're trying to bring these to the  
7 United States. I mean, when I buy my Toyota or whatever,  
8 it's not built in Japan anymore. It's built in the United  
9 States.

10          Senator Kelly: We want them investing in the United  
11 States.

12          Secretary Cao: We want them investing in us, sir.

13          Senator Kelly: I agree. And would you agree that  
14 rebuilding American commercial shipbuilding and sealift  
15 capacity is not just an economic issue, but a core wartime  
16 readiness issue.

17          Secretary Cao: Yes, sir.

18          Senator Kelly: All right. And so, taken together,  
19 would you agree then that as a matter of government policy,  
20 we should be working to develop such a commercial industry  
21 through regulatory regulation, reforms, tax incentives, and  
22 more.

23          Secretary Cao: We need to pull all lever, Senator. It  
24 includes like, for example, for shipyard workers, there's a  
25 lot of young people out there that went to college with the

1 hopes of getting a job and they can't do anything else. So,  
2 why can't we freeze their loans? And for every year they  
3 work in shipyard, we forgive that year. I mean, these are  
4 levers we need to pull as a country in order to get our  
5 industrial base going, sir.

6 Senator Kelly: Well, that could be a possible addition  
7 to my SHIPS for America Act, because we're trying to  
8 strengthen this legislation right now, and it tries to do  
9 all these things. And I think it's important that we  
10 recognize that no country has ever become a great  
11 shipbuilding power on the backs of military shipbuilding  
12 alone. Chinese have learned that lesson. So, given all  
13 that, I'm concerned by the growing discussion about  
14 outsourcing Navy shipbuilding work to foreign shipyards. To  
15 me, it risks treating the symptom instead of fixing the  
16 underlying problem. The United States maritime industrial  
17 base did not decline overnight. It happened over decades.

18 Now, to be clear, we need to work with our allies  
19 closely and partners like Japan and South Korea to counter  
20 China's shipbuilding advantage. We should also be sharing  
21 best practices, deepening repair cooperation, and leveraging  
22 allied expertise to cut down on our shipbuilding costs and  
23 production timelines. But there's a difference between  
24 working with allies and partners to strengthen our  
25 industrial base here and becoming strategically dependent on

1 foreign shipyards that could themselves become vulnerable to  
2 Chinese attacks in a conflict.

3       So, to put a fine point on it, we want to encourage  
4 these world-class shipbuilders to come here to the United  
5 States and invest here in the United States. And that's  
6 what the President's Maritime Action Plan and the SHIPS for  
7 America Act seeks to do. But for these foreign shipyards,  
8 if it's a lot cheaper for them to just get paid by the U.S.  
9 Navy to build ships in their existing shipyards, then  
10 they're probably not going to seriously consider investing  
11 in our maritime shipbuilding capability and capacity here.  
12 So, I'm interested in working with you, Mr. Secretary, on  
13 this. It's clear to me that it is a national security and  
14 economic imperative that we rebuild the maritime industry  
15 here in the United States. It's going to help the Navy.  
16 It's going to help the Marine Corps. It's also going to  
17 create good paying jobs.

18       You referenced, you know, young people who could have  
19 these great paying careers. Admiral, we can get up to two  
20 submarines a year. One of the things that can help is  
21 rebuilding the commercial sector. And, Mr. Chairman, I'm  
22 sorry I'm over my time, but this is one of my top  
23 priorities, and I look forward to talking to you about this  
24 with some of my colleagues, maybe later this month.

25       Chairman Wicker: Will you be an objection to asking

1 Admiral Caudle what he thinks of your questions?

2 Senator Kelly: No objection.

3 Chairman Wicker: Sir, go ahead.

4 Admiral Caudle: Well, you know, this is a complex  
5 topic. I need ships. I need them now. I need capacity.  
6 We have workforce limitations here. We have an industrial  
7 base that can't support the load without being creative on  
8 modularity and these new construction techniques. This is  
9 an all-hands-on deck thing. But what I will commit to is  
10 when we look at this and we're, we've got the money to go  
11 look at this hard that the Secretary and my chain of command  
12 will get my best military advice on it. This is not a no-  
13 brainer decision. When you start bringing foreign  
14 shipbuilding in and foreign ships into the United States  
15 Navy arsenal, I had to look closely at how we fight that  
16 ship, man it, how we, you know, damage control it, the  
17 procedures associated with it, and the part support that  
18 supply it. So, it will get a full hard look for me and my  
19 best military advice, Admiral.

20 Chairman Wicker: Admiral, but what about the earlier  
21 point of utilizing the commercial shipyards in conjunction  
22 with building our military?

23 Admiral Caudle: Well, Senator Kelly and I, we've  
24 talked about this before. There is no question he is right  
25 that when you gain the competency, and capacity, and the

1 expertise, and subject matter expertise of actually building  
2 ships in our country that that will translate naturally to a  
3 workforce that does that for a living, which will extend, by  
4 definition, over to being able to build more combat ships.

5 Chairman Wicker: You said there's really no question  
6 on that, that he's right. And I want to congratulate both  
7 of you for your statements today because I think that is --  
8 that's an opportunity that somehow, we've been missing in  
9 recent decades. Senator Sullivan, you're recognized for 2  
10 minutes.

11 Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Gentlemen,  
12 thank you for your service.

13 General, I want to begin with you. I want to commend  
14 you and the Marine Corps for the new Marine Forces-Alaska  
15 campaign and operation plan. General Shea did a great job  
16 up in my State last weekend. This, as you know, has a  
17 training kind of rotational force, 6th ANGLICO Reserve  
18 active component. So, thank you, first of all. A lot of  
19 excitement in Alaska on this initiative. Can you talk a  
20 little bit about it and maybe give your vision of future ops  
21 in the great State of Alaska, the most strategic place in  
22 the world according to Billy Mitchell, the father of the  
23 U.S. Air Force.

24 General Smith: Sure, I can. One, you know, I was  
25 taught as a young officer, the cold makes cowards of us all.

1 And the extreme cold of Alaska is something that we want to  
2 train. And it puts Bridgeport, our mountain warfare  
3 training center, to shame in terms of the extreme  
4 conditions.

5 Senator Sullivan: Very, very, very cold winter.

6 General Smith: And it is very cold, sir. So, you  
7 know, the Arctic is growing in its importance. It is not  
8 decreasing in its importance. And the Marine Corps has to  
9 be prepared to operate in those extreme conditions. And the  
10 Marine Rotational Force-Alaska and Supporting Arms Liaison  
11 Team-Alaska keeps Marines forward postured and ready for  
12 those extreme conditions. And those are expeditionary  
13 conditions. Supporting Arms Liaison Team Alpha-Alaska 6th  
14 ANGLICO detachment provides a permanent detachment to  
15 integrate with allies and enable rapid expansion, and again,  
16 a permanent, capable platform to integrate with allies and  
17 partners and to set the theater.

18 Because again, you can -- we are very, very close.  
19 When you get up into Alaska, you're very, very close into  
20 the Indo-Pacific theater. You have a reach. Our F-35s love  
21 training there. They love the wide, open airspace because  
22 you can do anything there. You can go into full mode. You  
23 can use the entirety of the F-35 spectrum up there. So,  
24 Alaska for us is vital, sir.

25 Senator Sullivan: Great. Well, I appreciate that.

1 And I was with a number of the military leadership from the  
2 Army in the Air Force just in the last week back home, and  
3 they are excited about more training with the Marines in  
4 Alaska. So, I think it's going to be a great initiative,  
5 and I appreciate you working with me and others. And like I  
6 said, General Shea did a great job.

7 Mr. Secretary, congratulations. Appreciate the hard  
8 work you're doing. You know, I want to talk about another  
9 initiative in Alaska. Last year, this committee  
10 appropriated \$115 million to rebuild the Navy base at Adak,  
11 which is very strategic, 1,100 miles west of Hawaii. A lot  
12 of people don't recognize that both the INDOPACOM commander  
13 and the NORTHCOM commander in testimony here in front of  
14 this committee said they strongly recommended reopening that  
15 Navy base for its strategic location. We're off to a strong  
16 start with that funding. A lot of partners now, not just  
17 the Army, or the Navy, and the Marine Corps, and the Coast  
18 Guard, but the State of Alaska is putting in money. The  
19 private sector is putting in money. It looks like a real  
20 innovative approach.

21 Can you commit to work with me and my team on this  
22 initiative? And I know we're both trying to get out there  
23 soon, you and I, to have -- you and I both walked the ground  
24 there, but can you give me your vision on that? It's going  
25 well, but I think we need the top leadership from the Navy

1 on this.

2 Secretary Cao: Absolutely, Senator. Thank you for the  
3 question. Again, I think I love the most is when we look  
4 from bird's eye view of -- on top of the polls, how close  
5 Alaska is, especially Asia and all those, the Aleutian  
6 Islands is to our competitors up in whether China or Russia.  
7 I mean, you've always shown that chart of all the Sags that  
8 are going through there --

9 Senator Sullivan: Yeah.

10 Secretary Cao: -- and it's unacceptable that we do not  
11 have the ISR along that area. So, I will work with you,  
12 sir, and I will -- I'd love to go to Alaska. I just didn't  
13 want to do it in January, sir, because I didn't want to get  
14 stuck there. But I would love to get to --

15 Senator Sullivan: Yeah, we'll get you there any time.  
16 Let me end here. I'm going to submit a question for the  
17 record on the Strait of Hormuz. CENTCOM commander, who I  
18 think is doing a great job, testified last week, have given  
19 the order he could open that with the Joint Force led by the  
20 Marine Corps and the Navy. By the way, Admiral, the Navy's  
21 doing an amazing job. But very quickly, the vice chairman,  
22 in the recent review, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs  
23 validated the MEU 3.0 concept. I think the MEU/ARG is  
24 clearly proving its worth throughout the world right now in  
25 terms of combat operations. It talked about an actual

1 Amphib fleet of 40 Amphibs and that would -- that was if  
2 there would be a 36-month maintenance cycle. We know that's  
3 kind of ambitious. If it's a 44-month maintenance cycle,  
4 the number is closer to 47 Amphib.

5 So, can I get a commitment from all of you? This is a  
6 really important issue to all of us, particularly the Marine  
7 Corps. Why don't we start with you, General Smith, just on  
8 the 3.0 MEU. Are you supporting the vice chairman's review?  
9 And Mr. Secretary and Admiral, I'd like to get your views on  
10 that very quickly as well.

11 General Smith: Well, the vice chairman is one of the  
12 smartest men I've ever met, so he's very smart. If he says  
13 it, then you can take it to the bank, sir.

14 Senator Sullivan: Mr. Secretary, are you?

15 Secretary Cao: I just sent forward my recommendation  
16 to the Secretary of War for a -- basically, the 56-month  
17 OFP, which includes 40 ships for the ARG, sir.

18 Senator Sullivan: And most importantly, Admiral, how  
19 about you? Forty Amphibs from the U.S. Navy?

20 Admiral Caudle: Fully committed. If you got nine  
21 deployed worldwide and you got a 4 to 1, that's 36. If you  
22 have a 5 to make 1, that's 45. So, I mean, 40 just makes a  
23 lot of sense that it's going to take that to give me the  
24 friction in there necessary to have a persistent 3.0, sir.  
25 So, I think it's a solid number, but we'll refine that as we

1 look hard at it. But it's a correct number.

2 Senator Sullivan: Great. Thank you. Thank you, Mr.  
3 Chairman.

4 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Sullivan, for that  
5 excellent line of questioning. Senator Shaheen, you're  
6 recognized.

7 Senator Shaheen: Thank you all for being here.

8 Secretary Cao, I want to begin with you because  
9 Congress has passed legislation, I know because I was one of  
10 the co-sponsors, that exempts the four public shipyards from  
11 future civilian hiring freezes. Implementation on that has  
12 lagged so much so that I had the opportunity to raise it  
13 with Secretary Hegseth when he was before the committee. He  
14 committed to investigate the hiring delays. Before he left  
15 as Secretary of the Navy, Secretary Phelan committed that  
16 there would be no further reductions in force at our public  
17 shipyards. Can you tell us what the status is currently of  
18 that?

19 Secretary Cao: Senator, thank you so much for your  
20 question, because the workers at Portsmouth Naval Shipyard  
21 are some of the best in America. And we -- again, I know  
22 there's been rumors. We are not laying off. In fact, all  
23 the wage grade workers are -- have been exempt from any  
24 cutbacks. And so, we will make sure we don't cut any more  
25 workers from there. So, you have my pledge. We will not

1 cut workers from shipyards.

2 Senator Shaheen: Thank you. I very much appreciate  
3 that. The other question is also an issue that's come up at  
4 the shipyard because civilian shipyard workers who are  
5 represented by the Metal Trades Council have filed an unfair  
6 labor practice with the Federal Labor Relations Authority  
7 related to changes in workplace conditions. The FLRA has  
8 refused to process this charge, citing Executive Order  
9 14251, which strips certain Federal employees of collective  
10 bargaining rights, and they have refused to process it  
11 despite an existing court injunction on the executive order.  
12 In his testimony in the House, Secretary Hegseth said that,  
13 "Collective bargaining agreements have affected efficiency,"  
14 but he couldn't articulate any specific examples. So, I  
15 would ask you, Secretary Cao, the same thing, but, beyond  
16 that, has the Navy assessed whether current uncertainty  
17 surrounding labor protections are going to be affecting  
18 workforce morale and readiness at our shipyards?

19 Secretary Cao: Again, Senator, anytime there's rumors  
20 of layoffs or anything else, it always affects morale, and  
21 workmanship, and everything else, and we will do everything  
22 we can to protect the wage-grade workers. Basically, your  
23 pipefitters, your ship fitters, your welders, your  
24 electricians, everybody that works really hard in the  
25 shipyard. I mean, we need to get this industrial base

1 going. We need to get America going. We need to build  
2 ships, and we need to do it yesterday. And so, we will make  
3 sure that we protect our workers.

4 Senator Shaheen: And I assume that the Navy will  
5 comply with the court order.

6 Secretary Cao: Senator, if it's a court order, then we  
7 will. We will do our best to comply to it.

8 Senator Shaheen: Thank you.

9 My next question is really for both Admiral Caudle and  
10 General Smith, because what we've seen from the operations  
11 in SOUTHCOM and in the Middle East, is that it's pulled  
12 equipment and resources from those arenas and also from the  
13 Indo-Pacific. So, can you talk about how you're addressing  
14 readiness, given those unexpected operations and what that  
15 means as you're thinking about the future. Admiral Caudle,  
16 I'll ask you to go first.

17 Admiral Caudle: Well, Senator, thank you, and thank  
18 you for your advocacy for the shipyard there, too. To state  
19 that, you know, the Navy's designed to do what we're doing  
20 in Epic Fury. You know, it does -- we do go to the well  
21 here to actually deliver that kind of combat power for  
22 sustained operations, but we're built to do that, and we  
23 will have to have some time to recover post-Epic Fury, to go  
24 rebuild some of that readiness.

25 But I am in good communication through the Chairman,

1 with Admiral Cooper, on any limitations, pushing parts,  
2 food, and munitions to the theater to be able to sustain  
3 those operations and to make sure that we're, you know,  
4 baking in time for Sailors and Marines to take a knee  
5 periodically in those operations so that we can sustain that  
6 fight. So, yes, it is straining. It is. It does distract  
7 from conducting some operations in other theaters by its  
8 very nature, but I am fully confident we can continue this  
9 until the President needs us to not do it any longer.

10 Senator Shaheen: Thank you. General Smith?

11 General Smith: Senator, I'll echo my shipmate, Daryl  
12 Caudle. The Marines like to deploy. We're built on a 1 to  
13 3, 6 away, 12 home, 6 away, but we're capable of operating  
14 on a 1 to 2, 6 away, 6 home, 6 away 6 home. We did that for  
15 years in Iraq, in Afghanistan, and the Marines like to  
16 deploy. In fact, I get rusty when I stay home too long.  
17 So, we are fully capable of continuing to keep up this pace  
18 in perpetuity.

19 Senator Shaheen: Well, I'm almost out of time, but I  
20 do want to ask a final question about Taiwan, because  
21 General Smith, I recently traveled to Taiwan, and we had a  
22 briefing from the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Force during a  
23 stopover in Okinawa. And it was very clear, as part of that  
24 briefing, just how critical our presence is.

25 And one of the things that I have been troubled by, and

1 I'm not going to ask you to respond to this, because I don't  
2 want to put you-all in a difficult situation, but it was  
3 very clear from our time in Taiwan, I think that was  
4 reinforced by the President's meeting with President Xi in  
5 Beijing, that China still is very much eyeing Taiwan. That  
6 is one of their priorities. And our presence and our  
7 support for Taiwan is absolutely critical.

8 That's why it's so troubling to me that we are holding  
9 -- that the President is holding the \$14 billion in sales to  
10 Taiwan that were approved by and noticed to Congress in  
11 January. So, Mr. Chairman, I'm not going to ask for a  
12 response from folks, but I do think it's important for us to  
13 weigh in on how important providing those sales to Taiwan  
14 are.

15 Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Shaheen. Senator  
16 Peters, have you voted?

17 Senator Peters: I have.

18 Chairman Wicker: How did you vote? I'm just kidding.  
19 You're recognized.

20 Senator Peters: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.  
21 Gentlemen, thank you for being here today. Thank you for  
22 your service to our country as well.

23 General Smith, as you know very well, the medium  
24 landing ship is going to allow the Marine Corps to rapidly  
25 move equipment, troops, and supplies without needing to rely

1 on existing port infrastructure. Certainly, that's going to  
2 be essential for the Marine Corps in any potential conflict,  
3 but, in particular, in the Indo-Pacific. So, my question  
4 for you is, can you share the importance with this committee  
5 of the medium landing ship to the Marine Corps, including  
6 your ship acquisition plans, as well as your desired  
7 fielding timeline? Because I know this is an important  
8 project for you.

9       General Smith: Yeah, the last part first. We can't go  
10 fast enough. We need them yesterday. The Landing Ship  
11 Medium, LSM, is our inter-island connector. It's what  
12 enables us to disaggregate and re-aggregate forces to make  
13 ourselves less targetable than we otherwise would be by the  
14 PRC. Primarily useful in the Indo-Pacific, but useful  
15 globally. It disaggregates and aggregates our forces. It  
16 moves our media missile batteries, it moves our ground-air,  
17 task-oriented radar, and it moves them into places that are  
18 not otherwise targetable by an adversary. You don't pull  
19 into your fixed ports, which are all well known. This thing  
20 with a shallow beach gradient can get you into multiple  
21 smaller ports and complicate an adversary's targeting  
22 regime, targeting calculus.

23       Senator Peters: Great.

24       I just want to follow-up, Mr. Secretary, as the  
25 Commandant outlined, the medium landing ship is certainly

1 key to the future of the Marine Corps, and it's -- I think  
2 it's absolutely essential, as the General outlined, that the  
3 Navy accelerates this program at least as much as possible.  
4 As you know, Mr. Secretary, I think, and Terry Marinette  
5 Marine, which is a kind of -- it's over in Wisconsin, but  
6 half the workers are in Michigan, to be very clear. I will  
7 construct several of the six planned vessels in Fiscal Year  
8 2027 budget. I understand Fincantieri has additional  
9 construction capacity right now to not only accelerate the  
10 program, but also which is incredibly important, they have  
11 to maintain their skilled workforce and that part of the  
12 country. And if they don't, it'll be hard to reconstruct  
13 that, and we can't lose those folks. So, my question to you  
14 is, how is the Navy ensuring that the landing ship by  
15 results, in a quick acquisition, and the four ships that  
16 Fincantieri can build very quickly can be facilitated?

17 Secretary Cao: Thank you for that question, Senator.  
18 Again, this is why we're going with a proven design ship. I  
19 mean, the Marines already walked from stem to stern of that  
20 ship to make sure that it fits with the Marine Corps needs.  
21 And that's why we need to get it out there quickly. Like  
22 you said, the first ship will be built in Mississippi and  
23 the next five will be built at Fincantieri, and this is why  
24 we need to get that going.

25 Senator Peters: Right. And you're committed to make

1 sure that --

2 Secretary Cao: Yes, Senator.

3 Senator Peters: -- it happens to make sure the Marine  
4 Corps has the tool that they need.

5 Secretary Cao: Yes, Senator.

6 Senator Peters: Good to hear. Thank you.

7 Admiral Caudle, as we discussed last year, the  
8 University of Michigan has the last standalone Naval  
9 Architecture And Marine Engineering Program at an R1  
10 university in the entire country. U of M's unique program  
11 can also rely upon access to world-renowned researchers and  
12 academics in nuclear engineering industrial operations to  
13 support their extensive naval engineering efforts there.

14 So, my question for you, sir, is what role could U of  
15 M's Naval Architecture Program play in mitigating what is a  
16 real technical workforce shortage that we're facing right  
17 now, and if unaddressed, certainly may continue to delay  
18 both submarine production as well as other naval ship  
19 building efforts?

20 Admiral Caudle: A huge role. You know, it often when  
21 we look at workforce shortages, we tend to immediately go to  
22 the vocational wage grade, blue collar-type jobs, which are  
23 vital electricians, plumbers, shipbuilders, fitters,  
24 welders. But these engineers that come from these types of  
25 degrees that understand how to actually build and design

1 ships is a critical part of the workforce we need at every  
2 commercial yard and every yard that builds our combat ships.

3 Senator Scott asked why does it take so long to design  
4 a ship? Well, quite frankly, it's because we don't have  
5 enough folks that understand what can be done with state of  
6 the art, computer-aided design, computer-aided manufacturing  
7 software tools, and artificial intelligence integrated into  
8 those tools to accelerate designs and get them into the  
9 drawing hands of our people to build these more quickly.  
10 So, places like this are exactly the type of thing we need  
11 to expand on and scale.

12 Senator Peters: And how are you working to promote  
13 that in places like the university?

14 Admiral Caudle: It's part of the submarine industrial  
15 base and maritime industrial base funding, part of the forge  
16 efforts. It's part of the thing that I think our PAE,  
17 undersea, and Admiral Gaucher will be doing to leverage  
18 that. I can talk to him specifically about this one-use  
19 case, but through the broader effort, I think we need to  
20 expand this that type of STEM degree, engineering majors, in  
21 this field to actually get on top dead center on this issue,  
22 sir.

23 Senator Peters: Great. Well, thank you. I'd love to  
24 talk more about that and how we can strengthen that program  
25 to meet this critical need. Thank you, gentlemen. Thank

1 you, Chairman.

2 Chairman Wicker: Very important point to end on,  
3 Senator Peters. Thank you, gentlemen, for an excellent  
4 hearing. A lot of good information. We stand ready at this  
5 committee to help you make a quantum leap. Let us know what  
6 you need.

7 Secretary Cao: Can I add one quick thing, sir? I'm  
8 sorry.

9 Chairman Wicker: As long as no one else walks in.

10 Secretary Cao: MQ-25 reached Milestone C, which is  
11 huge because now we have in-flight refueling that's  
12 unmanned. And there's something I wanted to bring up at the  
13 closed hearing this morning, but it's just it's a great  
14 capability for unmanned aircraft and refueling as well.

15 Chairman Wicker: Thank you very much. And feel free  
16 to expand on that and on the record. This concludes the  
17 open portion of today's hearing. I thank our witnesses.  
18 For the information of members, questions for the record  
19 will be due to the committee within 2 business days of the  
20 conclusion of this hearing.

21 [The information referred to follows:]

22 [COMMITTEE INSERT]

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1 Chairman Wicker: And we are adjourned.

2 [Whereupon, at 12:34 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

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21:24	76:11	<b>14</b>	<b>2-year</b>	42:15
27:12	<b>1.5</b>	54:7	50:13	<b>2032</b>
<b>\$115</b>	62:16	<b>14251</b>	<b>20</b>	29:14
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