

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 15, 2026

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary of Defense
United States Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Hegseth,

We write regarding the deployment of the USS Abraham Lincoln and mounting evidence that conditions aboard the carrier have deteriorated to the point that the safety and wellbeing of its crew could be compromised. These are deeply troubling reports, and the American people deserve honest answers.

The USS Lincoln departed San Diego on November 21, 2025. The ship has now been deployed for more than 250 days, including over 200 consecutive days without a port call, setting a modern-day record for continuous time at sea for a U.S. aircraft carrier. Family members of the sailors and Marines serving aboard have received urgent messages describing conditions that should alarm you, and everyone serving in a position of leadership at the Pentagon, to include concerns about exhaustion, food and water shortages, and mental health crises serious enough that multiple sailors reportedly attempted to go overboard.

In response to these reports, you publicly stated that the conditions aboard the carrier have been “completely misrepresented.” Even more galling, when asked by reporters about the conditions on the Lincoln, President Trump dismissed the concerns of the families and stated that the Lincoln had not been deployed “nearly long enough.”

Our sailors and Marines signed up to serve and to be treated with respect. They did not sign up to be kept at sea indefinitely with no announced return date and, by multiple accounts, without reliable food, hot water, or working plumbing. That is not how we treat the men and women we ask to carry out this mission.

This situation was preventable, and the conditions aboard the Lincoln are nearly identical to the issues faced by the USS Ford when it conducted an extended deployment that ended earlier this year. The USS Lincoln was redirected to the Middle East as the war with Iran began and has remained there as that war has dragged on with no clear endpoint. This is a symptom of poor planning by both you and the President and exacerbated by the deeply unsound decision to start a war with Iran. Open-ended deployments driven by an open-ended war have real consequences for our servicemembers, and we are seeing those consequences now.

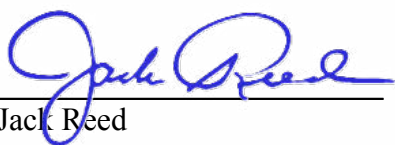
Recent press reports indicate that the USS George Washington will be deployed to the Middle East to relieve the USS Abraham Lincoln. While that is welcome news, the Department’s mismanagement of carrier deployments also means that the U.S. will not have an aircraft carrier in the Pacific for the foreseeable future. However, ensuring the USS Lincoln returns to port takes precedence, and it is incumbent on the Department to inform Congress, and the families, on the plan and timeline to get the crew home. Denial and defensiveness are not acceptable responses. Congress and these families need accountability.

Given the seriousness of these reports, we request written answers to the following:

- What is the current timeline for the USS Lincoln's relief and return to homeport, and what specific operational requirements are driving continued extensions of this deployment?
- Was the crew informed that the deployment could be extended indefinitely? Have any members of the crew been changed out since the beginning of this deployment, and if so, how many?
- Has there been any degradation in the operational capability of the USS Lincoln or her airwing?
- What mental health resources are being provided to the crew?
- Have there been any suicides aboard the ship during this deployment? How many instances of detected suicidal ideation or attempted self-harm, including attempts to go overboard, has the Department recorded?
- What other medical resources are available aboard the ship, and are resources sufficient to meet the crew's needs given the length of this deployment?
- What chaplain resources are available to the crew, and have they been adequate to the scale of need aboard the ship?
- What is the current state of good order and discipline aboard the USS Lincoln?
- What is the hygiene and healthy food situation on board, including the status of reported plumbing failures, water contamination, and food shortages?
- What is the extent of illness or injury aboard the ship, including full details of the reported man-overboard incident and any other similar incidents?
- What is the state of the families of the sailors and Marines aboard the USS Lincoln? What resources are being provided to them, and are they being kept informed on a regular basis about the status of the deployment and their loved ones' wellbeing?
- Will the Department authorize a bipartisan congressional delegation to visit the Lincoln to conduct firsthand oversight of conditions aboard the ship?

As the Secretary of Defense, you are accountable to the men and women who serve our nation. It is time for you to demonstrate leadership, rather than peddle excuses. The servicemembers we send into harm's way deserve nothing less.

Sincerely,



Jack Reed
Ranking Member, Committee
on Armed Services



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Gary C. Peters
United States Senator



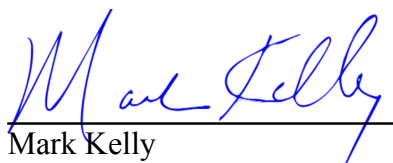
Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Mark Kelly
United States Senator



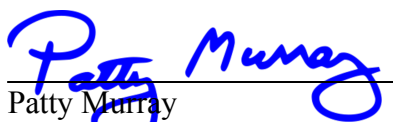
Elissa Slotkin
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Patty Murray
Vice Chair
Senate Committee on
Appropriations



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



Jacky Rosen
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Christopher A. Coons
United States Senator