

April 22, 2015

Honorable Ash Carter
Secretary of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We are part of a group of citizens who live on Lopez Island, Washington, 12 miles from Naval Air Station Whidbey Island where the nation's EA-18G Growlers are based. The Navy is evaluating adding up to 36 more Growlers to the current fleet of 82 stationed at NAS Whidbey Island.¹ We are monitoring the debate over funding the Navy's Unmanned Carrier-Launched Airborne Surveillance and Strike (UCLASS) program.²

The Growler mission "include[s] electronic surveillance and attack against enemy radar and communications systems. This involves the use of jamming equipment and anti-radiation missiles."³ Our questions are about the strategic and economic rationale for expanding the Growler fleet. This seems to be a mission that would be better delivered by unmanned aircraft due to the high risk to the Growler and its two-person crew from advanced anti-aircraft threats. We have read with great interest about the successful carrier takeoff, landing, and formation flying operations of the unmanned X-47B prototype⁴ that is part of the UCLASS program.

We ask the following questions so that our elected officials are well informed when making long-term strategic decisions on funding the UCLASS program and the potential acquisition of 36 more Growlers at a cost of about \$3 billion.⁵ As taxpayers we want our government to make cost-effective decisions to best defend our country.

1. What is the estimated acquisition cost of a UCLASS type vehicle when fully configured for this mission versus a Growler?
2. What are the personnel and other operating costs on a per unit basis?
3. What are the projected life-cycle costs on a per unit basis?
4. When would it be reasonable to assume that UCLASS vehicles would be available for this mission if the decision were made now to set that goal?

We thank you in advance for your response.

Sincerely,

Brian

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¹ <http://www.whidbeyeis.com/Files/Public/Documents/Whidbey%20Scoping%20Booklet.pdf>, pg. 7.

² <http://www.navaldrone.com/UCLASS.html>

³ <http://www.whidbeyeis.com/Files/Public/Documents/Whidbey%20Scoping%20Booklet.pdf>, pg. 10.

⁴ <http://breakingdefense.com/2014/08/x-47b-drone-manned-f-18-take-off-land-together-in-historic-test/>

⁵ http://www.dod.mil/pubs/foi/logistics_material_readiness/acq_bud_fin/SARs/14-F-0402_DOC_23_EA-18GDecember2013SAR.PDF, pg. 17, FY 2014. \$1870.5 million/21 aircraft = \$89 million each.

cc:

Honorable Robert O. Work, Deputy Secretary of Defense

Honorable Ray Mabus, Secretary of the Navy

Honorable John McCain, Chair, Senate Armed Services Committee

Honorable Jack Reed, Ranking Member, Senate Armed Services Committee

Honorable Maria Cantwell, United States Senator

Honorable Patty Murray, United States Senator

Honorable Rick Larson, United States Representative

Senator Kevin Ranker, Washington State Legislative District 40

Representative Jeff R. Morris, Washington State Legislative District 40

Representative Kristine Lytton, Washington State Legislative District 40

San Juan County Councilman Jamie Stephens