

CARL LEVIN, MICHIGAN, CHAIRMAN

JOSEPH I. LIEBERMAN, CONNECTICUT  
JACK REED, RHODE ISLAND  
DANIEL K. AKAKA, HAWAII  
E. BENJAMIN NELSON, NEBRASKA  
JIM WEBB, VIRGINIA  
CLAIRE McCASKILL, MISSOURI  
MARK UDALL, COLORADO  
KAY R. HAGAN, NORTH CAROLINA  
MARK BEGICH, ALASKA  
JOE MANCHIN III, WEST VIRGINIA  
JEANNE SHAHEEN, NEW HAMPSHIRE  
KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND, NEW YORK  
RICHARD BLUMENTHAL, CONNECTICUT

JOHN McCAIN, ARIZONA  
JAMES M. INHOFE, OKLAHOMA  
JEFF SESSIONS, ALABAMA  
SAXBY CHAMBLISS, GEORGIA  
ROGER F. WICKER, MISSISSIPPI  
SCOTT P. BROWN, MASSACHUSETTS  
ROB PORTMAN, OHIO  
KELLY AYOTTE, NEW HAMPSHIRE  
SUSAN M. COLLINS, MAINE  
LINDSEY GRAHAM, SOUTH CAROLINA  
JOHN CORNYN, TEXAS  
DAVID VITTER, LOUISIANA

**United States Senate**  
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6050

RICHARD D. DeBOBES, STAFF DIRECTOR  
DAVID M. MORRIS, MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR

February 6, 2012

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro  
Comptroller General of the United States  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

In January 2011, after a thorough review, then-Secretary of Defense Robert Gates restructured the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) program. As part of this restructuring, Secretary Gates put the Marine Corps' version of the JSF, the F-35B Short Take-Off & Vertical Landing (STOVL) variant, on "probation" for two years. According to Secretary Gates, probation was necessary because the F-35B was experiencing technical issues unique to this variant that could require potential solutions that would add to the aircraft's cost and weight. In his view, two years were needed to design and test engineering solutions to these issues and assess their impact. Secretary Gates indicated that, at the end of this probationary period, an informed decision could be made about whether and how to proceed with the F-35B.

On January 20, 2012, Secretary Panetta announced that he had removed the F-35B from probation. Given that fact, as part of your current annual review of the Joint Strike Fighter program, please provide an assessment of the following issues:

1. To what extent has only one year of development and testing beyond when Secretary Gates imposed the probation resolved the issues that Secretary Gates originally cited—many of which were first raised by GAO—when he first imposed the probation?
2. To what extent have the solutions to these issues been effectively engineered, integrated and tested—and resulted in a full understanding of their effects on cost, weight and other program attributes?
3. Since Secretary Gates originally put the F-35B on probation, have any more issues with the F-35B's structure or propulsion arisen? If so, please explain and describe to what extent have these issues been resolved. For those that remain unresolved, do they put at risk the F-35B's ability to achieve its performance requirements, or other attributes such goals for cost and weight?

Thank you for your consideration of this request. Questions about it may be directed to Creighton Greene with Chairman Levin's staff at (202) 224-6115 and Pablo E. Carrillo with Ranking Member McCain's staff at (202) 224-6371.

Sincerely,



John McCain  
Ranking Member



Carl Levin  
Chairman