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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6100

TELEPHONE: (202) 224-0642 FAX: (202) 224-4835

May 20, 2026

The Honorable Orice Williams Brown
Acting Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street NW
Washington, DC 50548

Dear Acting Comptroller General Williams Brown:

I write with significant concerns about the Navy's proposed "Golden Fleet" initiative, including the Trump-class battleship (BBG(X)) and FF(X) frigate, which together could cost more than \$200 billion. Before Congress considers any funding for these programs, it is essential that they receive rigorous independent oversight to prevent wasteful and ineffective use of taxpayer funds.

The Department of Defense's recent budget request includes more than \$43 billion over the next five years for the Trump-class battleship, including \$1 billion in advance procurement and \$836 million for research and development. However, the Navy's recent track record with major acquisition programs raises serious questions about whether these ships will be delivered on time, within budget, and with the intended capabilities.

For more than two decades, GAO has documented systemic weaknesses in Navy shipbuilding programs, including overly optimistic business cases, unrealistic contractor estimates, immature technologies at program commencement, and concurrency between design and construction. These problems have contributed to significant cost growth, schedule delays, and performance shortfalls in programs such as the Littoral Combat Ship (LCS), Zumwalt-class destroyer, Ford-class carrier, and Constellation-class frigate. Collectively, these programs cost billions more than planned, delivered fewer ships than expected, and left the Navy with a fleet no larger than what it projected in its first 30-year shipbuilding plan in 2003.

These challenges are especially concerning given China's rapid naval expansion. China continues to rapidly produce naval surface combatants, submarines, and long-range precision weapons supported by a shipbuilding industrial base far larger than ours. Continued U.S. delays, cost overruns, and program cancellations pose serious consequences for our strategic relationship with China.

At the same time, the U.S. industrial base remains strained by a combination of workforce shortages, shipyard backlogs, and declining productivity. GAO has repeatedly found that the Navy underestimates industrial base capacity challenges when beginning new ship classes, resulting in delays across the shipbuilding enterprise. Attempting to field a new 35,000-ton Trump battleship risks repeating past failures, including: overly optimistic assumptions, early cost growth, schedule slippage, and potential cancellation after billions have been spent.

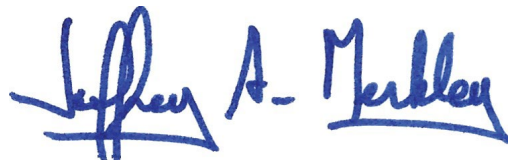
I am also concerned that the Trump-class battleship is misaligned or unaligned with the military's joint all-domain operations concept. A large battleship designed to carry directed energy weapons, hypersonic missiles, and nuclear-armed cruise missiles does not fit within the Navy's framework and would be vulnerable to China's increasingly sophisticated long-range precision weapons. To our knowledge, the Navy has not articulated a clear concept of operations for how the Trump battleship or other Golden Fleet assets would be employed, how they would survive in contested environments, or how they would integrate with the distributed force the Navy has been fielding for decades.

To support congressional oversight, I request that GAO review the Navy's plans for the Golden Fleet initiative and Trump battleship and address the following questions:

1. To what extent does the Navy's initial business case rely on overly optimistic assumptions about cost, schedule, technology maturity, or industrial base capacity?
2. How do these assumptions compare to GAO's past findings on major shipbuilding programs?
3. Has the Navy validated contractor cost estimates for BBG(X) and FF(X)?
4. What risks exist that early estimates understate true program costs?
5. What is the maturity level of directed energy systems, hypersonic weapons, nuclear-armed cruise missiles, or other exquisite weapon systems intended for BBG(X)?
6. What integration challenges does GAO foresee in combining these systems onto a single naval hull?
7. How does the Navy envision executing joint all-domain operations with the Trump-class battleship and other Golden Fleet assets?
8. How would introduction of BBG(X) and FF(X) affect existing shipbuilding programs, including destroyers, submarines, and amphibious ships?
9. Does the shipbuilding industrial base have the workforce and infrastructure to support these new ship classes without negatively affecting performance on other programs?
10. Has the Navy incorporated GAO's prior recommendations on business case discipline, technology readiness, and design maturity? If not, what gaps remain?

Given the scale of the Golden Fleet initiative, China's accelerating naval modernization, and the Navy's long history of acquisition challenges, independent oversight is essential before Congress considers authorizing tens of billions of dollars for these programs. GAO's review will help ensure accountability and responsible stewardship of taxpayer funds.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator
Ranking Member, Committee on Budget