



THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY
WASHINGTON DC 20350-1000

September 22, 2026

The Honorable Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Gillibrand:

Thank you for your August 15, 2026, letter addressed to the Secretary of War regarding the deployment and crew of the USS ABRAHAM LINCOLN (CVN-72). I am responding on Secretary Hegseth's behalf. The Department of the Navy (DON) shares your deep commitment to the safety, health, and morale of our Service Members, as well as the long-term material readiness of our fleet.

The men and women of Carrier Strike Group THREE have demonstrated exceptional resolve under demanding conditions. Operational decisions to extend deployments are never made lightly; they are driven by dynamic global security environments and the absolute necessity of protecting U.S. national security interests, our personnel, and our allies abroad.

Below are the responses to the specific questions raised in your inquiry:

1. *What is the current timeline for LINCOLN's relief and return to homeport, and what specific operational requirements are driving continued extensions of this deployment?*
 - While specifics about the ship's schedule as she transits remain classified, I can confirm that, as has been widely reported in the media, the LINCOLN has been relieved of her duties by the USS GEORGE WASHINGTON (CVN-73) in the Middle East and has since departed that theater.
2. *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?*
 - While the Navy does not design or characterize any mission as indefinite, crews are advised prior to underway periods that deployment timelines must remain flexible to meet dynamic global security demands. The Department remains committed to maximizing operational predictability and making every effort to limit extensions, executing them only when critical national security requirements leave no other viable alternative.

The table below provides the change in crew by month.

	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
Sailors onboard	2,879	2,889	2,827	2,779	2,720	2,687	2,687	2,703	2,624	2,585
Gain		61	31	27	18	5	0	65	29	40
Loss		51	93	75	77	38	0	49	108	79

Since December 2025, there has been a ship's company loss of 570 Sailors (19.8%) and a gain of 276 Sailors (9.59%).

3. *Has there been any degradation in the operational capability of the USS ABRAHAM LINCOLN or her airwing?*
 - The LINCOLN and her embarked air wing, Carrier Air Wing NINE (CVW-9), continue to maintain their deployment certifications and required levels of readiness.
4. *What mental health resources are being provided to the crew?*
 - The LINCOLN deployed with five chaplains, one embedded integrated prevention counselor, one psychologist, one clinical social worker, three behavioral health technicians, and one expeditionary facility dog.
5. *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?*
 - There have been no suicides onboard during this deployment. Since the beginning of LINCOLN's deployment, there have been a total of eight suicide attempts across the strike group – this number includes the LINCOLN crew and Sailors from the carrier air wing, strike group and destroyer squadron staff, escorting destroyers, and all embarked aviation squadrons.
6. *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?*
 - The assigned complement of medical personnel remained able to take care of all medical, surgical, and mental health needs for the crew throughout the entirety of the deployment to this point to include all routine and emergent health care needs. The ship has encountered no medical supply issues.
7. *What chaplain resources are available to the crew, and have they been adequate to the scale of the need aboard the ship?*

- LINCOLN has five Navy chaplains onboard which, in addition to the other mental health professionals mentioned above, have been adequate to meet the spiritual and emotional needs of the crew. To ensure equitable care across all units, each escort vessel in the strike group also has an organic chaplain embarked. These professionals provide 100 percent confidential pastoral care, monitor crew endurance, and act as immediate conduits to advanced medical and psychological resources, ensuring our personnel have continuous support both at sea and upon returning home.
8. *What is the current state of good order and discipline aboard the USS ABRAHAM LINCOLN?*
- Good order and discipline aboard the LINCOLN remain strong, reflecting the exceptional professionalism, leadership, and resilience of the crew throughout this historically demanding deployment.
9. *What is the hygiene and healthy food situation on board, including the status of reported plumbing failures, water contamination, and food shortages?*
- The LINCOLN maintains adequate food supplies. Due to her participation in major combat operations with limited opportunities for resupply in a combat environment, the number of main entrée options served during regular meal hours was reduced from two to one for a short time. This measure was implemented to optimize endurance and ensure sustained time on station. Four meals were served daily, and all meals provided were nutritionally balanced, with adequate calories per day made available to every Sailor. All meal options met the portion standards required by military regulations.
 - High-operational tempo and sea states occasionally delayed scheduled replenishment at sea evolutions. To adapt, the Navy prioritized the delivery of hygiene products, fresh provisions, and critical repair parts. Onboard, leaders established a scheduled weekly rotation for different squadrons and departments to streamline the distribution of restocked goods. Supply levels of essential items on the LINCOLN are stable.
 - Earlier in deployment, the ship experienced localized piping failures and temporary issues with its reverse osmosis desalination units due to high-ambient seawater temperatures and continuous operations. Shipboard engineering teams successfully completed repairs, and the potable water supply remains safe and tested daily.
10. *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?*
- There is no widespread illness or injury onboard. As mentioned previously, the ship's medical team is well-equipped to manage both routine and acute medical concerns of crew members. From a safety perspective, a comparative analysis of

the Navy program of record for mishap reporting shows no elevated mishap rates for the LINCOLN during its current deployment when compared to other carriers. Furthermore, a detailed review of the command's logs confirms zero Class A or Class B (major) mishaps have occurred. The reported incidents consist entirely of lesser Class C and Class D events, such as routine slips or handling injuries, which are characteristic of normal daily operations.

- A Sailor assigned to the air wing went overboard from the ship in early August. The Sailor was quickly recovered by an air wing search and rescue helicopter, treated by LINCOLN's medical department, and transferred off ship for follow-on care. The Sailor's family was notified according to standing notification policies. Additionally, one Sailor attempted to go overboard in March and was stopped by his shipmates. That Sailor was also provided immediate medical care and subsequently returned to homeport.

11. What is the state of the families of the sailors and Marines aboard the USS ABRAHAM 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?

- Families expressed their concerns to Navy leaders during a recent town hall regarding many of the same issues you have asked about in your letter. Leaders, including myself, provided families with as much information in response as was feasible while maintaining operational security. The LINCOLN has and will continue to leverage the ship's ombudsmen and the Family Readiness Group to provide reliable and consistent communications for loved ones while the ship is underway.

12. Will the Department authorize a bipartisan delegation to visit the USS ABRAHAM LINCOLN to conduct firsthand oversight of conditions aboard the ship?

- Yes. A bipartisan Congressional Delegation is in the planning stages to embark the LINCOLN following the ship's return home.

The DON held a classified briefing with the Senate Armed Services Committee on September 15, 2026. This briefing allowed us to discuss the specific challenges of the current deployment, onboard quality-of-life programs, and force posture in detail.

Thank you again for your dedication to our Service Members and their families. A similar letter has been sent to the other signatories of your letter. As always, if I can be of further assistance, please let me know.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hung Cao', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Hung Cao
Acting