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U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515–6035

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November 12, 2026

The Honorable Hung Cao
Acting Secretary of the Navy
1000 Navy Pentagon
Washington, DC 20350

Admiral Daryl Caudle
Chief of Naval Operations
2000 Navy Pentagon
Washington, DC 20350

Dear Acting Secretary Cao and Admiral Caudle:

We write to express deep frustration over the Navy's failure to notify the House Armed Services Committee of the relief of the Commanding Officer, Executive Officer, and Chief of the Boat of the USS South Dakota (SSN 790) on October 14, 2026.

On November 11, 2026, a reporter requested comment on the dismissal of SOUTH DAKOTA's command triad, allegedly attributed to a grounding incident. Though nearly a month after the relief of the command triad, no notifications of the personnel actions or the underlying incident had been made to the House Armed Services Committee. On November 12, 2026, an article was published on the incident, including confirmation from the public affairs office for Commander, Submarine Force Atlantic that the commanding officer of SOUTH DAKOTA was relived from his role on October 14, 2026.[1]

The Department of the Navy's failure to communicate these incidents to Congress is unacceptable. The committee and Department maintain long-standing customs for information sharing, that though not expressly written in statute, have included notifications for various types of at-sea incidents, accidents, and dismissals of members of the command triad. In the wake of the collisions affecting USS Fitzgerald (DDG 62), USS John S. McCain (DDG 56), and the grounding incidents involving USS Hartford (SSN 768) and USS Connecticut (SSN 22), clear and timely communication with Congress was necessary to make informed decisions to ensure personnel safety and readiness of the fleet. Even after these events, Congress relied on continued good-faith communication with the Department, as opposed to codifying notification

[1] The Day, "Commanding officer of a Groton-based submarine has been removed from his post", November 10, 2026

requirements. Failing to provide timely notifications to Congress is counterproductive to good policymaking and undermines the Department's stated goals of transparency and accountability and put leadership judgement into question.

To date, the Department of the Navy has not provided the committee with an official notification of the details of the CO's dismissal. The Navy's lack of transparency leave many outstanding questions about not only what occurred, but the impact of the events leading the triad's dismissal on the structural health of SOUTH DAKOTA, the well-being of the crew, and whether the incident laid bare any systemic issues with training to standard procedures that must be addressed. As a result of the Navy's failure to communicate, what should have been a standard exercise in information sharing has instead raised questions about the Navy's commitment to transparency and its commitment to a productive working relationship with Congress.

We request the following information to be provided not later than November 20, 2026:

1. What events led up to the relief of the entire SOUTH DAKOTA command triad on October 14, 2026?
2. Was their dismissal a result of a grounding or other mishap at sea? If so, provide details of the circumstances of the grounding or other mishap at sea.
3. If a grounding or mishap occurred, what is the preliminary cost assessment of damages?
4. If a grounding occurred, what are the details on the structural damages to SOUTH DAKOTA?
5. If a grounding occurred, what is the expected timeline for maintenance following the grounding of SOUTH DAKOTA?
6. If a grounding occurred, how many injuries were incurred and what were the extent of injuries?
7. What is the reason for the decision not to notify Congress, in contradiction of past standard practice?

Sincerely,

Adam Smith
Ranking Member

Joe Courtney
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Seapower
and Projection Forces