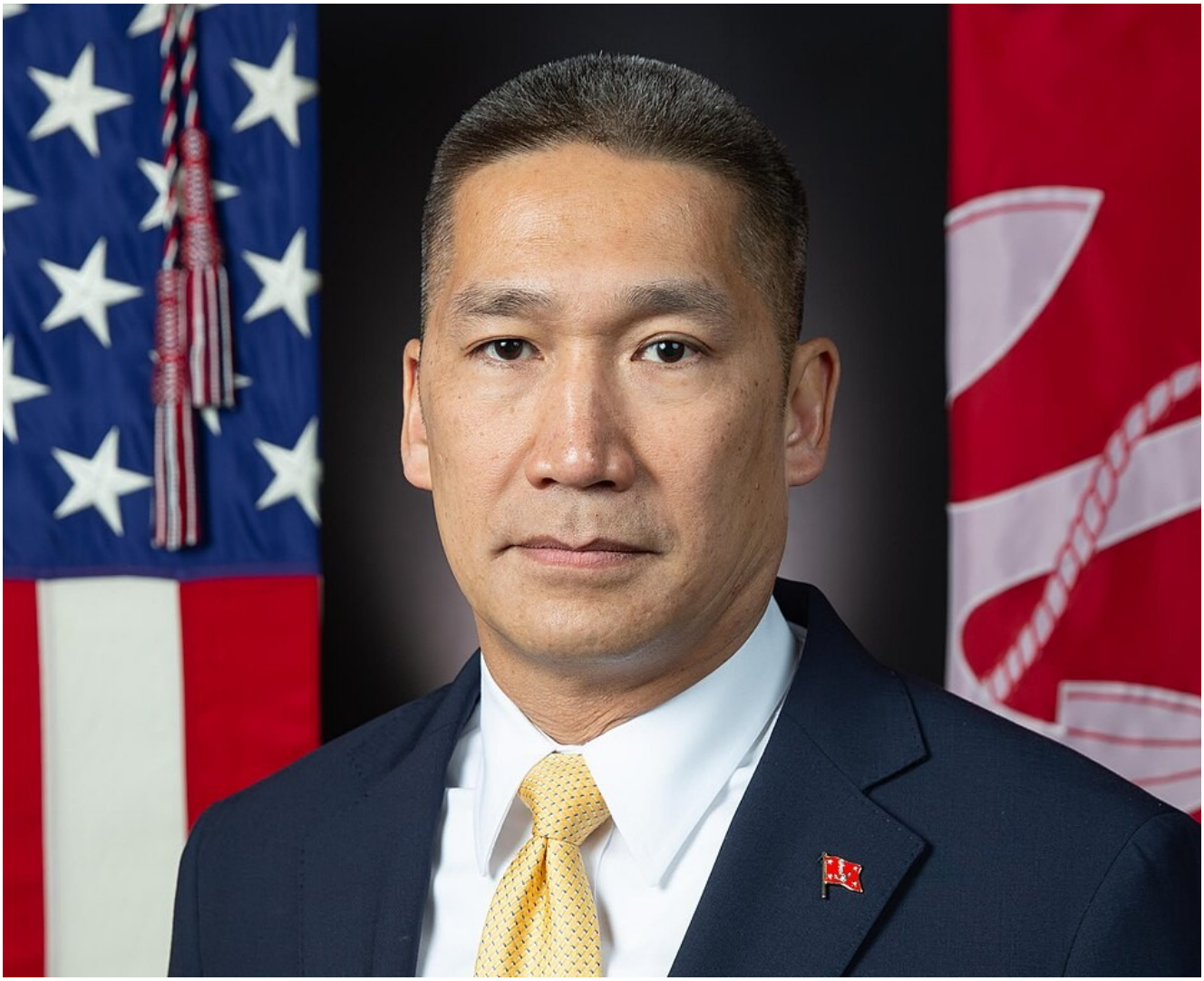
Senators Affirm Support for EMALS in SECNAV Confirmation Hearing



ARLINGTON, Va. — During a contentious confirmation hearing for the man nominated for secretary of the Navy, senators from both parties affirmed their support for continuing installation of electro-magnetic catapults on the Navy's Ford-class aircraft carriers.

President Donald Trump issued a memorandum directive on August 13 that "included language directing the Secretary of Defense and Secretary of the Navy to provide a plan for replacing the current electro-magnetic launch system for aircraft carriers

with steam and hydraulic systems," said Senator Tim Kaine, D-Virginia, during the November 17 confirmation hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) for Under Secretary of the Navy Hung Cao, who has been nominated for Secretary of the Navy.

The USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78) is the first aircraft carrier equipped with the Electro-Magnetic Aircraft Launch System (EMALS), which replaced the steam catapults used on previous carriers. The EMALS is built by General Atomics Electro-Magnetic Systems.

"I recently visited the Ford and I went on the flight deck and I talked to the Sailors on that flight deck – many of whom had worked carriers that both had steam and hydraulic launch systems and the EMALS system, and they were very complimentary of it," Kaine said.

The Gerald R. Ford returned in May from a post-Vietnam record deployment –326 days, from June 24, 2025, to May 16, 2026 – that took the carrier to Operation Absolute Resolve in the Caribbean Sea in January and then to Operation Epic Fury off Iran.

Cao pointed out that "the malaise with EMALS and the [Ford's weapons] elevators is delaying our carriers by seven years. We're going to have five years when we're going to be down to nine carriers [out of 11 required by law]. I'm trying to accelerate that."

Kaine said the Ford's Sailors told him the EMALS "works very, very well" and warned that changing the design of the subsequent Ford-class carriers would be problematic and expensive and result in a diminished capacity.

"I do hope you will consider the experience of those who have been operating these launches on the Ford before you decide to go down a path what would be more expensive and also less capable," he said.

The SASC chairman affirmed Kaine’s position.

“Returning to steam [catapults] is a non-starter, said the chairman, Senator Roger Wicker, R-Mississippi. “And everybody needs to understand that.”