

U.S. Rep. Gallagher: Bipartisan AUKUS Working Group celebrates first anniversary of the Trilateral Security Agreement

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WASHINGTON, DC — AUKUS Working Group co-chairs Reps. Mike Gallagher (R-WI), Joe Courtney (D-CT), Derek Kilmer (D-WA), and Blake Moore (R-UT) today released a joint statement to celebrate the one-year anniversary of the Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) trilateral security agreement. The agreement was first announced by the three countries on September 15, 2021, with aims to deepen diplomatic, security, and defense cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. The AUKUS agreement focuses on two fundamental pillars. The first is providing Australia with the capability for its own nuclear powered submarine program, and the second is collaborating with the U.K. and Australia on other advanced capabilities, including cyber, artificial intelligence, quantum and undersea technologies, and several more.

“While the partnership between the U.S., Australia, and the U.K. has long been vital to global peace and prosperity, the AUKUS framework took this relationship to the next level by expanding collaboration in nuclear submarine technology—the crown jewel of the US

military—as well as in critical emerging technologies. The anniversary of this historic partnership reminds us not only of what has been accomplished in the past year, but also of how much work remains to make this vision reality. As threats continue to grow around the world, it’s imperative we continue to build on this momentum and remain laser-focused on ensuring we are trained and equipped to counter CCP aggression and protect our interests in the Indo-Pacific,” **said Rep.**

Gallagher.

Recognizing the importance of this strategic partnership and the need for broad reaching advocacy on the Hill, Friends of Australia Co-Chairs Courtney and Gallagher teamed up with U.K. Caucus Co-Chair and House defense appropriator Kilmer, and with Armed Services Committee member Moore, to form [the AUKUS Working Group](#). The “AUKUS Caucus” serves to highlight Congressional interest and to advance bipartisan legislation that furthers the security interests of the three likeminded nations.

*“Our strategic partnership with Australia and the United Kingdom reflects our unwavering commitment to the Indo-Pacific,” **said Rep. Courtney.** “At a time where countries are faced with a decision between aligning with democratic institutions that value the sovereignty of independent states, and autocratic institutions that use economic and political coercion to further their influence, those nations need to know that we have their back, and that we aren’t going anywhere. As we await the conclusion of the initial 18-month consultation period on AUKUS, we must work together to deliver short and mid-term capabilities while maintaining focus on the keystone capability: providing Australia with the technology for a conventionally armed, nuclear powered submarine. These ambitions will not become reality overnight, but through persistent work, clear vision, a unified effort, and firm belief in the worthiness of our cause, we will prevail.”*

*“Strategic alliances and partnerships with key allies across the globe are more important than ever for America. That includes our continued effort to work with critical allies, the United Kingdom and Australia, to strengthen our security partnership in the Indo-Pacific,” **said Rep. Kilmer.** “I look forward to continuing to work the Chairman Courtney and my colleagues in the House to support this critical alliance.”*

*“One year removed from this monumental agreement, our challenging geopolitical landscape has justified the need for partnerships like AUKUS and other opportunities for collaboration with our most trusted allies,” **said Rep. Moore.** “Considering recent Chinese provocations in the Solomon Islands and the continued aggression against Taiwan, now is the time to recommit and reinvest in partners with shared interests and values. The US has no greater friends than the UK and Australia, and Congress is committed to the success of AUKUS.”*

The AUKUS Working Group has worked diligently to ensure the success of the new

defense alliance. Thanks to their efforts, this year marked a historic “first” for the U.S. Congress: the House’s FY23 *National Defense Authorization Act* (NDAA) includes the first-ever provisions from the House or Senate in support of AUKUS. These provisions were authored by Rep. Courtney, and the AUKUS Caucus Co-Chairs worked together to ensure that both were included to the House’s NDAA on a bipartisan basis. These provisions will support the AUKUS alliance by:

- **Establishing a Submariner Training Pipeline**—The House’s FY23 NDAA now includes a provision that would establish a training program for Royal Australian Navy submarine officers to begin training at the U.S. Navy Nuclear Propulsion School, and eventually to be assigned to duty on operational U.S. submarines in support of the AUKUS partnership. [The provision was adopted directly from Rep. Courtney’s U.S.-Australia Submarine Officer Pipeline Act](#), a bill introduced by AUKUS Caucus co-chairs Courtney, Gallagher, Kilmer, and Moore in June.
- **Securing Critical Resources Through the Defense Production Act**—The House’s NDAA also now includes a Courtney-authored amendment to add Australia and United Kingdom to the definition of a “domestic source” under the *Defense Production Act*. This measure will help support a robust defense industrial base and cooperation with our closest allies, and will expand access to critical resources and rare earth minerals to accelerate defense innovation enterprises between the U.S., Australia, and the U.K.

In the months following the announcement of AUKUS, while challenges to the international rule of law and flow of commerce in the Indo-Pacific have continued, the need for increased cooperation in the region between the U.S. and its allies has come into sharper focus. In April, serious concerns were raised when reports confirmed that Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare was nearing an agreement that would have permitted the Chinese People’s Liberation Army to establish a naval base in the Solomon Islands, just 1,200 miles from Australia’s coastline. In an interview with the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Rep. Courtney likened the encroachment to **“boiling a frog, where you turn up the temperature bit by bit.”** [Click here to read more.](#)

In late August, the Solomon Islands announced that it would suspend docking rights for U.S. and allied navy ships, and other foreign vessels while it conducted a review of its security policies. Ironically, the announcement barring other U.S. and allied ships from making port in the Solomon Islands was made by Prime Minister Sogavare during the welcoming ceremony for the *USNS Mercy*, which had arrived at

port in Honiara to carry out disaster relief efforts. As a result, the U.S. Coast Guard's *USCGC Oliver Henry* was denied a routine request to make port for refueling and provisions.

In interviews with *The Australian*, Rep. Courtney stated that the **“Solomon Islands’ tacit denial of a benign Coast Guard vessel on mission to protect legal fishing in the region smacks of foreign influence by the People’s Republic of China,”** and Rep. Gallagher urged the AUKUS partners to **“prioritize reversing the current disastrous trend in the Solomons before it’s too late. [...] A foreign aggressor seems bent on conquering the islands from within without even firing a shot.”** [Click here to read more.](#)

Presently, the keys to unlocking the AUKUS agreement are tightly held by the three countries’ Joint Steering Groups, who have met many times over the course of this year to identify barriers and define outcomes. Despite the close hold by the three governments, AUKUS Working Group members continue to engage at every level, including meetings with members of Parliament, senior defense officials and maritime experts, exchanges between American and Australian officials both in the U.S. and in Australia, and more.

Of the many tasks undertaken, a principal focus is on how best to deliver the nuclear powered submarine capability to Australia by 2040. Six months remain on the initial 18-month consultation period, and the widely anticipated path forward should be realized come March of 2023. Despite the close hold by the three governments, AUKUS Working Group members continue to engage at every level, including meetings with members of Parliament, senior defense officials, and official travel to Australia.