

## **Opening Statement**

**Joe Courtney, Chairman**

### **Seapower and Projection Forces Subcommittee Hearing**

**“Department of the Navy FY20 Budget Request for Seapower and Projection Forces”**

**26 March 2019**

The Seapower and Projection Forces subcommittee meets this afternoon to hear testimony on the Department of the Navy’s Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 budget request. Before us today to discuss that request are Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development, and Acquisition James Geurts, Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Warfare Systems Vice Admiral Bill Merz, and Deputy Commandant for Combat Development and Integration Lt. Gen. David Berger.

The Department of the Navy’s budget request for FY20 is a reflection of the collaboration and “productive disagreement” between the Navy and Congress about the future of our naval forces. In previous years, this subcommittee has been presented budgets which did not address force structure requirements in a meaningful amount of time or did not achieve them at all within the time horizon of the thirty-year shipbuilding plan. Accordingly, this subcommittee has worked to find efficiencies and savings to ensure that we are keeping pace with retirements and working towards a force structure of 355-ship navy.

For example, the Navy has now fully embraced the two-carrier buy which this subcommittee authorized in last year’s defense authorization. The projected savings from this approach have only grown since originally proposed and are now estimated at more than \$4 billion. Those are significant savings which we can drive into other programs and have the added benefit of supporting the carrier industrial base providing consistency and certainty into the program.

I am particularly heartened that the Navy and the wider Department of Defense have included funding for a third Virginia-class submarine in the FY20 budget. This subcommittee has worked for two years on making that increase in our submarine procurement a reality in order to meet the urgent demand for undersea forces that we have heard from our combatant commanders. We authored language in the FY18 NDAA to include multi-year procurement authority above the two per year build rate — language which was signed into law in both the final FY18 NDAA and in FY18 omnibus appropriations act. The subcommittee last year included both authorization for funding a third Virginia-class submarine and a requirement that the next block contract include options for additional submarines. The attack submarine force will face one of the deepest and most prolonged shortfalls from its requirement over the next three decades and increasing procurement is critical to mitigating that shortfall.

With this budget, we are also beginning to see future procurement programs come into greater and much needed focus. The Columbia-class program enters its final year before procurement, and increasingly utilizes tools that this panel has provided through the National Sea-Based Deterrence Fund to ensure that we keep this vital program on track. The request includes funding for the first future frigate for which the Navy intends to sign an initial contract in FY20. I know that the schedule to transition from the Littoral Combat Ship to frigate has been aggressive, but I am glad to see that the plan for this year is moving ahead expeditiously and on schedule.

As with any budget request, however, there will be questions and concerns which this subcommittee will continue to have and will influence the defense authorization bill we ultimately draft. I strongly disagree with the Navy's decision to forgo refueling for the USS Harry S. Truman, given both the Navy's own stated force structure requirement and the statutory mandate to sustain a twelve carrier fleet, and I know that some will have questions about the procurement of amphibious ships in this budget request. I also have concerns about the acquisition plan for unmanned surface vessels – which is funded through a research and development account and long before we have a solid understanding of the operational concepts in which they will be employed. Similar initiatives have been pursued in the past that did not serve the Navy well.

And while manpower issues do not fall under the jurisdiction of this subcommittee, I am glad to see the Navy addressing the reality that we must have a sufficient number of Sailors to man the fleet we are building. I had the opportunity earlier this month to address a graduating class of 759 Sailors at Great Lakes Naval Station and thanks to the leadership of Admiral Michael Bernacci, Captain Erik Thors, and all of the personnel at Recruit Training Command, I know that we will continue to produce the best Sailors in the world. Our role will be to make sure we provide the ships, submarines and aircraft they need to fulfill the goals they joined the Navy to accomplish.

With that, I would welcome any opening remarks from Ranking Member Wittman.