

Statement of Chairman Adam Smith
House Armed Services Committee Hearing on:
“Department of the Navy Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Request”
April 28, 2022

Good morning.

I believe the Department of the Navy has submitted a sound budget that balances risk by divesting legacy platforms while making investments in the advanced systems that we need in the future. I want to stress the importance of divesting legacy systems or even systems that may still have service life but are not in a material condition to add value or are not relevant for a future engagement. We cannot continue to hold on to ships or aircraft in an effort to claim that we are meeting some arbitrary fleet size. I have long stated that a thousand ship Navy composed of tugboats is no Navy at all. We must move past the obsession of what the number of ships should be and instead focus on what mix of ships and capabilities are needed. I believe the proposed retirement of Cruisers in the budget request is the right move despite the years of investments we made to try and make them relevant assets. The original phased modernization plan proposed by the Navy almost ten years ago and the eventual 2-4-6 plan imposed by Congress were both failed efforts. It turns out we were both wrong.

On the sustainment side, I am encouraged to see that the navy is fully funding its ship depot maintenance account. For many years, that was not the case. I am also pleased to see the resourcing for the shipyard infrastructure optimization plan (SIOP) is continuing. The four public shipyards in the United States are national treasures but their infrastructure dates back hundreds of years in some cases. The fundamental element to a ready fleet is how well you can maintain it. While I am pleased to see the funding of SIOP, I continue to be concerned that its execution plan may not be realistic. Issues like the seismic vulnerabilities at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard that the Navy identified earlier this year only further complicate that issue. I look forward to hearing an update on SIOP execution.

On the Marine Corps side, I continue to support the Commandant’s force design and its subsequent implementation. Moving back to the Corps’ roots as an expeditionary force closely tied with its Navy family is the right move. I applaud General Berger for being willing to take bold moves that have not always been popular even within his own force. A more maneuverable and distributed expeditionary force aligns well with the Navy’s distributed lethality concept and I believe they will complement each other well. I am aware that there has been much discussion about how many amphibious ships the Navy should maintain to properly support the Marine Corps. I will simply say that I believe that amphibious ships are key instruments in avoiding conflict. Whether that is through joint exercises with partners and allies or through the robust humanitarian capabilities they provide.

I want to thank all of you for your service and I look forward to your testimony.