

May 12, 2008: Weekly Washington Update

Submarines have been a central component of our naval forces for over a century. Since World War II, the United States has employed a number of different submarines to conduct military operations around the globe.

During the Cold War the submarine emerged as one of our nation's best tools for preventing the threat of World War III and today the submarine helps our Navy conduct numerous operations in the War on Terror. Our national defense demands that we have a strong and capable Naval Fleet, and with the capabilities inherent to the Virginia class, I have little doubt that our Navy will continue to be strong and capable. The Virginia Class Submarine was the first combatant to be built for post-Cold War operations. It has become an integral component of the Fleet and one of the most requested assets by the Combatant Commanders.

Yesterday, the House Armed Services Committee's Seapower and Expeditionary Forces Subcommittee approved its recommendation, or "mark," for the Fiscal Year 2009 National Defense Authorization bill (H.R. 5658). During consideration of the bill, I co-sponsored an amendment that would increase the authorization for Virginia-class advanced procurement to accelerate the procurement to two submarines per year. The amendment, authored by a bipartisan panel of legislators and cosponsored by Rep. Brad Ellsworth, Rep. Randy Forbes, Rep. Joe Courtney, and myself, passed on a unanimous and bipartisan voice vote.

As you may know, this subcommittee secured \$588 million for the advanced procurement of an additional submarine in the FY 08 budget to support the construction of two submarines per year in 2011, a year earlier than previously planned. This year's amendment will provide an additional \$300 million in advanced procurement authorization to allow the second FY11 submarine to be started one year earlier in 2010. This would provide the resources necessary to change the current submarine production rate from two per year starting in FY11 to a 2-1-2 build rate between FY10 and FY12, followed by a sustained rate of two submarines per year.

This is the first step in a long process that will develop over the next several months. The Seapower recommendation moves to the full House Armed Services Committee for consideration next week.

More advanced ships above and below the seas will enable the United States to meet our national security challenges, and there is no better ship than the Virginia Class Submarine to face today's risks. Building two submarines per year beginning in FY11 will enable us to sail the course of setting a 313-ship Navy as a floor rather than a ceiling, and it will enable our industrial base to purchase long-lead items and establish processes that will maintain our naval superiority for decades to come.

I am proud to have been joined by my fellow Virginian, Representative Forbes, in offering such an important amendment. Increasing predictability and stabilizing the workforce and industrial base will enable us to build the submarines tomorrow we have a need for today. I believe this adopted amendment will be a positive step in strengthening our nation's fighting forces, and I am honored to do my role in supporting the men, women, and equipment of our nation's military.