

112 Congressmen Call for Second Virginia-Class Sub in 2021



The Virginia-class fast-attack submarine USS Washington returns to Naval Station Norfolk, Virginia, on Feb. 11 after its maiden deployment. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Alfred A. Coffield

WASHINGTON – The congressional push for reinstatement of a second Virginia-class submarine in the 2021 defense budget has attracted the support of 112 congressmen.

A letter from three congressmen on the Seapower subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee – sent to the House Appropriations Committee in support of the additional Virginia SSN as well as for the Columbia-class ballistic-missile submarine (SSBN) – was endorsed by an additional list of 109 congressmen.

The letter to Defense Appropriations Chairman Pete Visclosky (D-Ind.) and ranking member Ken Calvert (R-Calif.) was drafted by Rep. Joe Courtney (D-Conn.), the Seapower subcommittee's chairman, Rep. Rob Wittman (R-Va.), ranking member, and another member, Rep. James R. Langevin (D-R.I.). All three represent districts in states that host submarine builders. The 112 signers include 72 Democrats and 40 Republicans.

“The 112 members that have joined this request represent 32 states, over 14,000 suppliers and over \$10 billion in manufacturing and support activity in the submarine supply chain,” Neil McKiernan, a staffer for Courtney, said in a March 18 release.

During recent hearings, the three drafters were critical of

the Navy's budget proposal that limited sub construction starting in fiscal 2021 to one Virginia SSN, together with the long-planned Columbia SSBN.

The objections included the apparent retrogression regarding a 355-ship Navy and attaining a submarine force large enough to support the National Security Strategy, a force level currently set at 66 SSNs. Under current shipbuilding plans and planned retirements, the SSN force level will decline to 42 boats by 2027.

The Navy has put the second Virginia SSN at the top of its 2021 unfunded priorities list. The service and its two sub builders, General Dynamics Electric Boat and Newport News Shipbuilding, succeeded in recent years in reducing the cost of a Virginia SSN to allow the Navy to afford two per year.

The letter notes that then-Chief of Naval Operations John M. Richardson told Congress in 2019 that "with respect to the greatest gap between the warfighting requirement and current inventory, there's no greater need than the attack submarine fleet. ... It's a wide gap and it's getting wider. So, every submarine counts against closing that gap."

"The proposal to request one attack submarine is contrary to the National Defense Strategy, the needs of our combatant commanders, and a decade of congressional action in support of a steady two-a-year build rate," the letter said. "Of note, the Navy recently ranked the restoration of the second 2021 Virginia-class submarine as its top unfunded requirement. To that end, we respectfully request your strong support for two Virginia-class submarines in [fiscal] 2021."