Geurts: Navy Balancing Columbia, Virginia Sub Production



James Geurts, the assistant Navy secretary for research, development and acquisition, at Sea-Air-Space 2019 on May 7, discussing the sea service's submarine production challenges.

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NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. – The meeting of Navy leaders with submarine shipbuilding industry officials, planned for this month, will focus on integrating the production of the Columbia-class ballistic missile sub and the future Virginia-class attack boats, the Navy's top acquisition executive said May 7.

The biggest issue is removing any conflict in the production of the two classes of submarines, which will be built by the same two shipyards – Newport News and Electric Boat, James Geurts, the assistant Navy secretary for research, development and acquisition, told reporters after his luncheon speech at the Navy League's annual Sea-Air-Space exposition. The concern is the impact on Columbia if Virginia production "gets out the box," Geurts said. That issue could become acute in five years when both submarines are in serial production.

The planned meeting was announced by Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson, who said it would seek to add back some of the schedule margin for Columbia that has been eroded by production problems. Maintaining the schedule for Columbia

is crucial, because the first boat must be ready for its strategic deterrence patrol in 2031 when the first of the Ohio-class ballistic missile subs is forced to retire.

If any conflict in production emerges, Geurts said, the priority will be Columbia.

One another current acquisition issue, Geurts minimized the impact from President Donald Trump's decision to reverse the Navy's budget proposal to retire the aircraft carrier Harry S. Truman rather than put it through the planned mid-life nuclear refueling and overhaul, which would give it 25 years of additional service life. Geurts said the change affected very little money in the fiscal 2020 budget, which is being processed in Congress. The cost of keeping Truman in service and paying for the refueling and overhaul will be worked into the fiscal 2021 budget, and "we'll do what needs to be done," he said.

In his speech at the Navy League luncheon, Geurts urged the industry and Navy officials in the audience not to focus on sequestration and other budget problems but look at what the Navy has accomplished in the last 18 months. "I've been incredibly impressed with how fast this organization has changed," he said.

He said the Navy has saved about $30 billion through acquisition reform and has

accelerated some
production systems by six to eight months, and industry is saving money through
innovation. He noted that the Navy would deliver 12 ships this year, more than
it has produced in decades. “We are getting tools out to the fleet,” he said.