Geurts: Navy Focused on Preserving Shipbuilding Industrial Base

USS Independence at the Austal USA shipyards in Mobile, Alabama, whose production of Independence-class littoral combat ships and Spearhead-class expeditionary fast transport ships will end in the next few years. Austal USA

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy's top acquisition official said the service is focused on sustaining its shipbuilding industrial base and the shipyard workers, critical to avoiding the pain of losing the services of any yard and its highly trained work force.

"The shipyard workers in that workforce are valuable members of our shipbuilding community and have built great ships and built them well for our Navy," said James F. Geurts, speaking July 30 to reporters during a teleconference, responding to a question from *Seapower* about the Austal USA shipyard in Mobile, Alabama, whose production of Independence-class littoral combat ships and Spearhead-class expeditionary fast transport ships will end in the next few years.

"I am absolutely interested in ensuring that we don't lose large chunks of the industrial base such as that shipbuilder or others."

Geurts said that "restarting an industrial base that you lose is really hard, really painful, and takes a long time. We are absolutely focused on ensuring we do not lose an industrial base because we don't have the time or resources to re-generate it later when we need it."

He emphasized the value of the Defense Production Act in shoring up the industrial base. "We've been working with

Austal to enhance their capabilities to be able to be effective for future ships," he said. "So that work is ongoing as a shared activity between the Navy and the shipbuilder there."

He also pointed to the current stimulus bill draft in Congress, noting that "there is certainly opportunity there to look for key capabilities that we can build in the near term that allows us to bridge to future needs."

Geurts said he was optimistic about the future of shipbuilding for the Navy, including for Austal.

"For the entire shipbuilding community, it' a heck of an exciting time here," he said. "We have a lot of new ship types that we want to go build, both manned and unmanned, so the critical activity from my perspective is ensuring we've got the industrial base – both at the shipbuilder and the supplier – ready to go so we can pivot and continue to expand the number and types of ships we're building and drive the cost out of those ships."