HASC Subcommittee Budget Markups Bar USS Truman's Early Retirement, Provide 3.1% Pay Raise, Fund Third Virginia-Class Sub



Sailors transit the flight deck after colors aboard the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman. The carrier is scheduled for early retirement but might be spared that fate, thanks to action June 4-5 in the subcommittees of the House Armed Services Committee. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Apprentice Donovan M. Jarrett

The House Armed Services Committee (HASC) took initial steps June 4-5 toward passing a fiscal 2020 National Defense Authorization, with the HASC's six subcommittees approving the "chairmen's marks." But a partisan dispute broke out over the Strategic Forces panel's language that would block or restrict several new nuclear weapons programs called for in last year's Nuclear Posture Review.

The full House Armed Services Committee will take up the subcommittees' recommendations and other issues next week.

Other than the partisan controversy in the Strategic Forces committee over nuclear issues, the recommendations from the six subcommittees contained generally bipartisan provisions such as a 3.1% pay raise, added support for service members and their families and approval of most of the major aircraft, ground equipment and shipbuilding

procurement
programs.

The
Seapower and Projection Forces panel, for example, would authorize construction
of 11 battle force ships, including three Virginia-class attack submarines,
three Arleigh Burke destroyers, one new frigate and two towing, salvage and
rescue vessels, which the U.S. Navy had requested. But it cut one of the two
John Lewis-class fleet oilers requested and replaced it with incremental
funding for the second of the Flight II amphibious transport docks that the U.S.
Marine Corps seeks.

The
Seapower mark formally barred the Navy from retiring the aircraft carrier USS Harry
S. Truman early and restored $17 million in advanced procurement for the
carrier’s refueling and overhaul. And it reauthorized the Maritime Security
Program, which subsidized operations of commercial sealift ships and
recommended creation of a tanker security fleet of 10 commercial tankers
supported by that program. The panel also moved to force the Navy to act on the
congressionally mandated program to start building new or buying used vessels
to modernize the aged reserve sealift fleet.

Seapower’s
mark expressed anger that the cost caps imposed on the Gerald R. Ford-class

carriers prevented the Navy from including the capability for Ford to support F-35C Lightning II fighter. It orders the Navy to include F-35C capabilities before accepting delivery of the John F. Kennedy, the second ship in the class.

The subcommittees did not provide details on the numbers of aircraft they were authorizing, leaving that for the full committee. But Seapower's ranking member, Rep. Rob Wittman (R-Virginia), said its mark increased the buy of V-22s, P-8As, E-2Ds and C-130Js. Tactical Air and Land Forces adopted "economic order quantity" language allowing purchase of parts and material for future F-35s to help reduce cost. The panel ordered an independent study of the procurement and lifecycle costs and sustainability of the multiservice F-35 and the latest Block 4 software.

The panel restricted half of the authorized funding for the Marine Corps' CH-53K until the Navy provides briefings on the technical problems that have delayed operation of the heavy-lift helicopter. It also demanded detailed plans on modernization and sustainment of the Navy's MH-53E helos.

A CH-53K King Stallion helicopter demonstrates its capabilities at the 2018 Berlin Air Show. The Seapower and Projection Forces restricted half the authorized funding for the CH-53K until the Navy provides briefings on the technical

problems that have delayed operation of the heavy-lift helicopter. U.S. Marine Corps/Cpl. Hailey D. Clay

The Personnel subcommittee increased efforts to stop the epidemic of sexual assaults and harassment by adding counseling support and protection for victims, but did not make sexual harassment a crime, which Senate Armed Services did. The panel authorized personnel increases of 5,100 for the Navy, 3,700 Air Force and 100 Marines and a cut of 7,500 for the Army. It barred the Pentagon from cutting 18,000 uniformed medical personnel pending an independent analysis of the impact on medical care.

The Intelligence and Emerging Threats panel called for "comprehensive and robust" science and technology and research and development efforts to stop the erosion of technological advantage, requiring action of 56 specific areas including artificial intelligence and hypersonics. It also required additional programs to increase cybersecurity for government and defense industry systems. And it ordered an independent assessment of the roles, missions and force structure of the Special Operations Forces, which are shifting from counter-extremism to great power competition.

The HASC subcommittees' proposals traditionally are bipartisan documents crafted by

the majority and minority staffs and passed with minimal discussion, reserving major debate and conflict for the full committee process, which is set for next week.

But the Strategic Forces subcommittee's mark clearly showed the strong opposition of HASC Chairman Adam Smith (D-Washington) to the expansion of nuclear weapons programs advocated by the Trump administration. That included blocking development of a "low-yield" nuclear warhead for submarine-launched ballistic missiles and restricting the accelerated production of the plutonium "pits" that are the explosive core of atomic arms. The mark also prevents the Navy from developing a hypersonic "conventional prompt strike" missile designed solely for submarines but leaves open work on a missile for surface warships.

The partisan nature of the proposed authorization was shown by only the name of subcommittee chairman, Rep. Jim Cooper (D-Tennessee) appearing on the draft, without the ranking Republican's name, which was on all the other subcommittees' proposals. That was amplified by a statement from the HASC's top Republican, Rep. Mac Thornberry (R-Texas) and subcommittee ranking member, Rep. Mike Turner (R-Ohio), who called it "a partisan and irresponsible" mark "that

makes us less safe, hinders our ability to defend ourselves.” That ensures a prolonged fight in next week’s full committee markup.

Because of the strong partisan dispute, the subcommittee had to engage in a prolonged debate over a Republican amendment that would have removed the language banning the submarine-launched low-yield weapon, opposing building a second plant to produce plutonium pits and maintaining participation in the Open Skies Treaty, which allows the United States and Russia to fly over each other’s countries to confirm compliance with arms control treaties.

The amendment was defeated on an 8-10 party line vote. The Republicans then demanded unprecedented votes on adopting the mark and on sending it to the full committee, both of which passed by 10-8 party line votes. The fight will be repeated next week.

The Readiness Subcommittee completed its markup June 5, calling for action to address the recent crisis in privately managed family housing, including adopting a “tenants bill of rights.” The panel also ordered assessments and long-term plans to mitigate the threat to military installations from the extreme weather and rising oceans caused by climate change. Because of the risk to off-base water supplies, the mark would ban the use of

fluoride-based
firefighting foam except in actual emergencies and ordered the Navy secretary
to develop requirements for nonfluoride foam by 2025. And it ordered action to
improve the supply of parts for the F-35 and other actions to address the
readiness impact of supply line problems.

Subcommittee
Chairman Rep. John Garamendi (D-California) made a short statement opposing the
president’s use of military funds for the Mexican border wall, while the ranking
member, Rep. Doug Lamborn (R-Colorado), supported the action because of the
“crisis” on the border. But to maintain the bipartisan nature of the mark, the
panel deferred any action of the border wall money until the full committee
acts next week.