House Armed Services Chairman Downplays Party Differences Over 2020 Defense Spending



An artist rendering of the future Columbia-class ballistic missile submarine, which Democrats have fully funded under the proposed fiscal 2020 National Defense Authorization, says the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee. U.S. Navy illustration

The

House Armed Services Committee chairman downplayed the partisan differences

over the fiscal 2020 National Defense Authorization but said the "biggest

threat" to adequate defense funding was the failure to reach agreement on

lifting punishing spending caps.

Although

the chairman's mark he released would ban funding for lowyield nuclear warheads

for a submarine-launched ballistic missile and defense money to build U.S.-Mexico

border barriers and provide \$17 billion less in total defense spending, which

the Republicans oppose, "the overwhelming majority of this bill, that is

incredibly important, is not controversial," said the chairman, Rep. Adam Smith (D-Washington).



Rep. Adam Smith (D-Washington) on June 10 downplayed partisan differences on defense spending. C-SPAN Addressing

a Defense Writers' Group breakfast June 10, Smith cited a 3.1 percent military

pay raise, funds to continue improving readiness, efforts to fix deteriorating family

housing, funding for 11 Navy battle fleet ships, including three attack

submarines, and "countless other projects, all of which we agree on," that are in

the Democrats' proposal. "The amount of stuff that we disagree on is about 2% of the bill."

But

in response to a Seapower question about the impact on defense funding if

Congress and the administration cannot agree on lifting caps enacted with the

Budget Control Act of 2011, which would cut nearly \$90 billion from the base

defense budget, Smith said: "You have correctly identified the biggest threat

we face." Senate Republicans were expected to plead for a deal to lift the caps

during a White House meeting on June 10.

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Rep. Adam Smith, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee

The

committee will take up the NDAA on June 12, and the debate is likely to go well

into the night as Republicans have attacked provisions that came out the

subcommittee process as an unusual breach of HASC's tradition

of

bipartisanship.

Smith

defended the proposed total defense funding of \$733 billion as the number

initially recommended by the Pentagon and said the \$750 billion requested later

by the Trump administration "would encourage inefficiencies." Committee

Republicans, however, insisted \$750 billion was necessary to meet the 3% to 5%

real growth recommended by last year's Strategic Capabilities Commission.

Please join CSIS at 2:30 pm for a discussion with House Armed Services Committee Chairman @RepAdamSmith (WA-D) on U.S. national security challenges in advance of the markup of the FY2020 National Defense Authorization Act.

Watch live: https://t.co/Wy3LZEeNP0
pic.twitter.com/z70FmorQtJ

- CSIS (@CSIS) June 10, 2019

Although

Smith repeated his long-held view that the military wants to spend too much on

nuclear arms, he noted the Democrats would fully fund the new B-21 strategic

bomber and the Columbia-class ballistic missile submarine to replace the aged

Ohio class and would increase overall spending on strategic programs. Smith and

some arms-control advocates argue that the new W-76.2 lower-yield warhead for

the submarine-launched Trident D-5 missile would reduce the

strategic load of the Ohio boats and increase instability.

0ther

controversial issues in the proposed NDAA are a ban on use of defense funds to

build President Trump's border wall, would require that any use of troops for

border security not affect combat readiness and would be paid for by the U.S.

Department of Homeland Security. It also would restrict the administration's

ability to reprogram defense funds to use for border security, which the

president did this year.

Although

the proposal would increase the purchase of F-35s for the Air Force, it would

fence some of the funding for the Lightning II pending analysis of ways to

improve the parts supply line for the fighter. Similarly, funding to buy more

of the Marine Corps' CH-53K heavy-lift helicopters would be curtailed until the

U.S. Navy submits reports on how it will fix technical problems hampering the program.

There

also will be debate on the nature of a future command to manage space programs,

with the Democrats resisting the president's demand for a separate service,

which Smith called too expensive and bureaucratic. But Smith said he believes

the Air Force has done a poor job managing space.