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 low-yield 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.*
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> *Watch live: https://t.co/Wy3LZEeNP0 pic.twitter.com/z7OFmorQtJ*
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> *— 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.

Other 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.