Navy Awards $9.47 Billion to Electric Boat for Columbia SSBN Construction



An artist’s rendering of the future Columbia-class ballistic missile submarines. The 12 submarines of the Columbia class are a shipbuilding priority and will replace the Ohio-class submarines reaching maximum extended service life. U.S. Navy
ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy is sailing full speed ahead on its Columbia ballistic-missile submarine (SSBN) program with a $9.47 billion contract to General Dynamics Electric Boat for the full construction of the future USS Columbia (SSBN 826) – the lead ship of the class – and for advance procurement, advance procurement, and coordinated material buys for the second boat of the class, the future USS Wisconsin (SSBN 827).

The Naval Sea Systems Command contract, announced Nov. 5 in a virtual press conference with reporters by James F. Geurts, assistant secretary of the Navy for Research, Development and Acquisition, was ready in waiting for the execution of the fiscal 2021 defense budget, but the Navy obtained authority from Congress to make the award as an exception to the limitations of the current continuing resolution.

The Columbia program, a recapitalization of the Navy’s strategic deterrent nuclear submarine force, is the service’s No. 1 acquisition priority. The Navy plans to build “at least 12” Columbia SSBNs to replace its fleet of 14 Ohio-class SSBNs, according to Rear Adm. Scott Pappano, program executive officer for the Columbia program, also speaking at the conference. The Columbia will carry the same Trident D5LE ballistic missile type as the Ohio class.

Geurts said the Columbia program was on track and stressed the importance of keeping it that way. He praised the efforts of

Electric Boat and the Navy's program team and their workers for the hard work in keeping the program on schedule.

Pappano said the Columbia will be delivered in fiscal 2027 and will be on patrol early in fiscal 2031. The SSBN likely will serve into the 2080s.

Capt. Scott Rucker, the Columbia program manager who also spoke at the conference, noted that the last start of a new SSBN occurred in the 1970s. He said the Columbia, over the last decade, has gone through numerous design reviews and production reviews and is in a high state of design completion.

Rucker said the Columbia program had more than 5,000 suppliers in 48 states.

Geurts, noting that the Columbia design was more mature "than any other sub we've ever done," said that the next major program event would be the full construction contract for the Wisconsin in 2024.

He said that early efforts had "burned off" much of the technological risk but that the Navy was hawking the program continuously to protect the margin in the schedule.

Pappano said the program used large-scale land-based prototyping and construction prototyping to shake out the design and processes and reduce risk. Some advance construction he noted included the missile tube compartment, with 13 tubes delivered to date, 11 of which have been completed for the Columbia and the Royal Navy's new class of SSBN. He and that he was confident of the boat's new nuclear reactor and permanent magnet motor.

Rucker said the cost for the lead boat would be $7.44 billion in calendar 2017 dollars. Congress has set a threshold of $8 billion in 2017 dollars for the average cost of subsequent boats, noting that the cost includes government-furnished

equipment. He said congressional authorities in the National Sea-Based Deterrence Fund were leveraged for the program.

Rucker said the first quad pack of missile tubes for the Columbia would be competed in February 2021. Huntington Ingalls' Newport News Shipbuilding has started construction on the stern, which will "come out" in spring 2021 and "the bow will go in." He said that large sections of the ship already are in construction.