

Navy Positions Contract Option for 2 Columbia SSBNs



An artist rendering of the future Columbia-class ballistic missile submarines. U.S. NAVY

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy has awarded an \$869 million contract modification for continued work on the Columbia-class ballistic-missile submarine (SSBN) design and support, but which also includes an option to build the first two Columbia SSBNs when funds are authorized and appropriated by Congress, the Navy announced on June 22. The work to ready the contract option will enable the Navy, if authorized, to begin construction of the first Columbia in October 2020.

Naval Sea Systems Command awarded General Dynamics Electric Boat the \$869 million contract modification to pursue “continued design completion, engineering work, affordability studies and design support efforts for the Columbia class,” the 22 June Defense Department contract announcement said. “This modification also includes submarine industrial base development and expansion efforts as part of the integrated enterprise plan and multi-program material procurement supporting Columbia SSBNs and the nuclear shipbuilding enterprise (Virginia-class [submarine] and Ford-class [aircraft carrier]). The contract modification also provides additional United Kingdom Strategic Weapon Support System kit manufacturing and effort to support expansion of the domestic missile tube industrial base.”

The contract modification also features an option – that already has been fully priced by the Navy – that would start construction of the first Columbia, SSBN 826, in October 2020, and fund advance procurement, advance construction and 2024 construction start of the second Columbia, SSBN 827. If exercised, the option would increase the value of the contract

to \$9.5 billion.

In a June 22 teleconference with reporters, James F. Geurts, assistant secretary of the Navy for research, defense and acquisition, said the Navy is focused on its supplier industrial base and improving the capacity of its sub-tier vendors, which would reduce risk in its nuclear ship programs and thereby reduce risk and delay in the Columbia program. He expressed appreciation of Congress for its support of the Navy's efforts to shore up the industrial base.

Geurts said the work of the Navy to price out the two SSBN contract option will help the service keep on schedule and achieve economies on materials and advance procurement for the class.

Rep. Joe Courtney, D-Conn., chairman of the House Seapower and Projection Forces Subcommittee, in whose district Electric Boat's main facility is located, praised the Navy's initiative in a June 22 statement.

"Today's announcement means 'game on' for this exciting and transformational project that will shape our region's economy for the next two decades – and I know that our talented shipbuilders of Electric Boat are up to the challenge," Courtney said. "This award is the culmination of nearly a decade's worth of preparation for this milestone moment for our region and our nation," Courtney said. "The replacement of our sea-based strategic deterrent comes only once every other generation, and this work is already fueling unprecedented growth in the workforce in Groton and transformation of the shipyard. This isn't just good news for Groton – the work that will be done on this program will fuel activity at suppliers across our state and our nation for years to come. This exciting news is a testament to the hard work of countless designers, engineers and waterfront tradesmen and women who have worked so hard each and every day for more than a decade to see this day come."

Geurts said the strategic imperative of fielding the USS Columbia on its first deterrent patrol in 2031 requires a delivery of the submarine in 2028.

The Navy plans to build 12 Columbia-class SSBNS to replace 14 Ohio-class SSBNs. The Trident D5LE nuclear-armed ballistic missile will arm both classes.