

Navy Seeks Ways to Streamline Shipbuilding



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The United States projects its presence around the globe through its warships, impacting geopolitical decisions daily while maintaining the American way of life, said Brett A. Seidle, acting assistant secretary of the Navy for research, development and acquisition.

Seidle testified today before the Senate Armed Services Committee's subcommittee on seapower regarding the state of conventional surface shipbuilding.

"We have fielded the finest Navy ever assembled in the history of the world, and I believe that is still true," he said.

The backbone of a strong Navy is its shipbuilding enterprise, Seidle added. Those who build ships are passionate about what they do and their role in supporting national security.

He said there's a need to reinvigorate the nation's industrial might, particularly in shipbuilding. Various challenges hinder more ships from being delivered on time and budget. Costs are rising faster than inflation, and schedules on multiple programs are delayed one to three years.

"We need increased modernization, infrastructure investment, better workforce hiring and retention, and improved supply chain performance," Seidle noted, adding that the assistance of Congress and the Navy's industrial partners will be key to solving these challenges.

Navy Vice Adm. James P. Downey, commander of Naval Sea Systems Command, also testified.

Downey said Navsea is committed to appropriately evaluating cost, schedule and technical requirements to deliver the right capabilities to the warfighters.

He said the command continually reviews its shipbuilding military specifications and is committed to collaborating with industry to simplify and streamline wherever possible. Also, the command is transitioning design plans into digitized formats, thereby reducing the burden on shipbuilders.

Downey said Navsea continues to face mounting challenges, from shifting demographics and workforce shortages to supply chain disruptions that collectively continue to pressurize

shipbuilding contracts.

“We need strategic solutions to improve waterfront productivity, and we are evaluating contracting approaches and incentives while also centralizing that data to better access what levers are needed to improve shipbuilding performance,” the vice admiral said.

Currently, the Navy has 92 ships under contract, with 56 vessels actively in construction. In addition to these prime shipbuilding contracts, Navsea has several shipyards that outsource work. Downey said the process results in a more distributed shipbuilding model with somewhat more complex oversight required.

He said Navsea is committed to helping industry create productive and safe workspaces on the waterfront to attract and retain the skilled workforce needed to build the Navy the nation needs.

“When you visit the shipyards and speak to the workers, whether it’s welders, machinists, front office staff or engineers, you understand what it means to them to build a great ship from the keel up, to start with nothing, and then to deliver a fully capable warship – that’s the product of teamwork in its purest form of execution,” he said.