Senate Bill Devotes More Money to Shipbuilding, Creates Pacific Deterrence Initiative

Jamal Outlaw, of Portsmouth, Virginia, cuts a flat bar in the hangar bay aboard the aircraft carrier USS John C. Stennis in Norfolk on March 10. The Senate Armed Services Committee's $740.5 billion version of the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act includes a billion-dollar boost in shipbuilding. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Jarrod A. Schad

ARLINGTON, Va. — The Senate Armed Services Committee's $740.5 billion version of the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act includes a billion-dollar boost in shipbuilding to $21.3 billion, signaling support for the 355-ship U.S. Navy "as soon as practicable."

The legislation, approved June 10 by a 25-2 bipartisan vote, authorizes $1.4 billion more than the Navy's budget request for shipbuilding. The legislation shifts to the full Senate for debate.

"The FY21 NDAA ensures the United States fields a force of the optimal size, structure and strategy, capable of supporting conflict as envisioned by the [National Defense Strategy]," which refocused U.S. attention on a "Great Power Competition" with China and Russia, according to an executive summary of the Senate bill. The House Armed Services Committee is slated to begin marking up its own version of the 2021 NDAA on June 22.

The fiscal 2021 NDAA also establishes the Pacific Deterrence Initiative (PDI) "to send a strong signal to the Chinese

Communist Party that America is deeply committed to defending our interests in the Indo-Pacific." The initiative would focus resources on military capability gaps, reassure U.S. allies and partners and bolster the credibility of American deterrence in the Indo-Pacific, the summary stated.

The bill authorizes $1.4 billion for the PDI in fiscal 2021, including $188.6 million above the Pentagon's budget request for Indo-Pacific requirements such as missile defense, enhanced forward posture and improved interoperability with allies and partners. The bill also authorizes a PDI topline of $5.5 billion for fiscal 2022 and directs the secretary of defense to create a spending plan for these resources.

The increased shipbuilding authorization calls for procurement of seven battle force ships, one less than the Navy's budget request, due to an amphibious transport dock ship previously authorized by Congress. It also includes multiship contracting authority for up to two Columbia-class ballistic missile submarines, three San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock ships and one America-class amphibious ship. It also authorizes $500 million for long lead time material for two other amphibious ships.

The Senate panel's bill provides for an increase of $472 million for Virginia-class attack submarine advance procurement to preserve the option to procure 10 Virginia-class boats between fiscal years 2019 and 2033. Also authorized is $350 million to improve sub and surface ship supplier stability. The measure also authorizes $260 million for long-lead time material for Arleigh-Burke-class guided missile destroyers.

The authorization bill establishes a Navy-U.S. Department of Labor joint shipbuilding industrial base working group and requires the comptroller general to review shipbuilding and ship repair as well as the Supervisor of Shipbuilding organization.

In aviation, the bill authorizes $9.1 billion to procure 95 joint strike fighters, including $2.4 billion for 23 carrier-based F-35Cs and $1.2 billion for 12 short takeoff/vertical landing F-35Bs for the U.S. Marine Corps.

The Senate bill also requires the Navy to create an acquisition strategy for the fighter aircraft force and report on carrier air wing composition and carrier-based strike fighter squadrons “to better prepare for potential conflicts envisioned by the National Defense Strategy.”