Top HASC Republican Says His Vote Hinges on GOP's 2020 Budget Add-Ons

An E-2D Hawkeye lands on the flight deck of the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN-72). The House Republican version of the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act calls for the purchase of two more of the early-warning aircraft. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Jeff Sherman

The House Armed Services Committee's ranking Republican says his vote to pass the fiscal 2020 National Defense Authorization Act will depend on whether the final bill continues the recent progress is preparing the military to confront Russia and China or slides back into the readiness crisis that started with the 2011 Budget Control Act and sequestration.

To ensure continued gains in readiness and future capabilities, Rep. Mac Thornberry (R-Texas) said June 11 that he will offer an amendment to increase the bill's funding by $17 billion, which includes about $4 billion for additional U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps aircraft, ships, unmanned vessels, weapons and emergency repairs of hurricane damage to two East Coast Marine bases. Thornberry said he also will propose restoring cuts made by the majority Democrats in strategic nuclear programs, ballistic missile defense and personnel issues.

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> *this continue the gains we have made in rebuilding our military and in being in a competitive position with Russia and China?”*
>
> *Rep. Mac Thornberry (R-Texas), ranking member, house armed services committee*

But for national defense to receive even the $733 billion total offered by Democrats – let alone the $750 billion Thornberry and Republicans seek – Congress and the Trump administration would have to approve a budget bill to override Budget Control Act spending caps, which would take nearly $90 billion from 2020 defense spending.

Some conservative Republicans and Trump aides oppose raising the caps for domestic issues, which the Democrats insist must accompany higher defense spending. But in a breakfast meeting with defense writers, Thornberry said he would remind fellow Republicans that the first job of the federal government is to defend the country. And “if we are going to fulfill our duties, we will have to take some things that we don’t necessarily like or want.”

When Republicans fully controlled Congress, they agreed with the Obama administration on a bill that waived the caps for fiscal years 2018 and 2019, which allowed substantial increases in defense spending and some growth in domestic programs. So far, no such agreement has been reached for fiscal 2020 and 2021, which are the last two years covered by

the Budget
Control Act limits.

The aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78) is maneuvered by tugboats in the James River. The Republican draft of the 2020 NDAA criticizes the Navy's handling of the Gerald R. Ford, the ship's technical and mechanical issues and its cost overruns. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Ryan Seelbach

Thornberry said one of the "greatest accomplishments" of the last two years was "to rebuild our military after it was deeply damaged by sequestration.

… We have seen the consequences of cutting our military, in accident rates and
other things. It's not like these are just number on a spread sheet. These are
real lives, life-and-death decisions that we make.

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a competitive position with Russia and China?"

Within the $17 billion spending increase Thornberry's amendment would authorize is funding for four additional Navy F-35Cs Lightning
II strike fighters; two Marine vertical-lift F-35Bs; one more E-2D Hawkeye
early-warning aircraft; more funding for aircraft carrier construction; 38
long-range missiles and additional mission modules for Littoral Combat Ships;
the second fleet oiler and unmanned surface vessels cut by the Democrats;
$748.8 million for Navy hypersonic research; $211 million for the overhaul of
the aircraft carrier USS John C. Stennis (CVN-74); $1.2

billion for various
personnel programs; and $2.3 billion for emergency repairs of hurricane damage to
Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point and Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune in
North Carolina.

https://twitter.com/BreakingDefense/status/1138506952319934464
The Republican funding plan also would restore authority to field the low-yield nuclear warhead for the submarine-launched Trident D-5
ballistic missiles and funding for modernization and expansion of the nuclear
weapons production facilities.

Their draft NDAA also sharply criticizes the Navy's handling of the new USS Gerald R. Ford aircraft carrier (CVN-78), which ran far past its
planned budget and production schedule and, due to numerous mechanical and
technical problems, is not expected to be ready for operations until this fall
– more than two years after the Navy accepted it. The NDAA protests that the Gerald
R. Ford is not capable of fully supporting operations of the F-35C Lightning IIs
and it would bar the Navy from accepting the second ship in the class, USS John
F. Kennedy (CVN-79), currently under construction, until it is made compatible
with the F-35C.

Thornberry would not say if he supports the
restrictive language on the Kennedy but said: "Sometimes we need to put things
in the bill to get their attention."