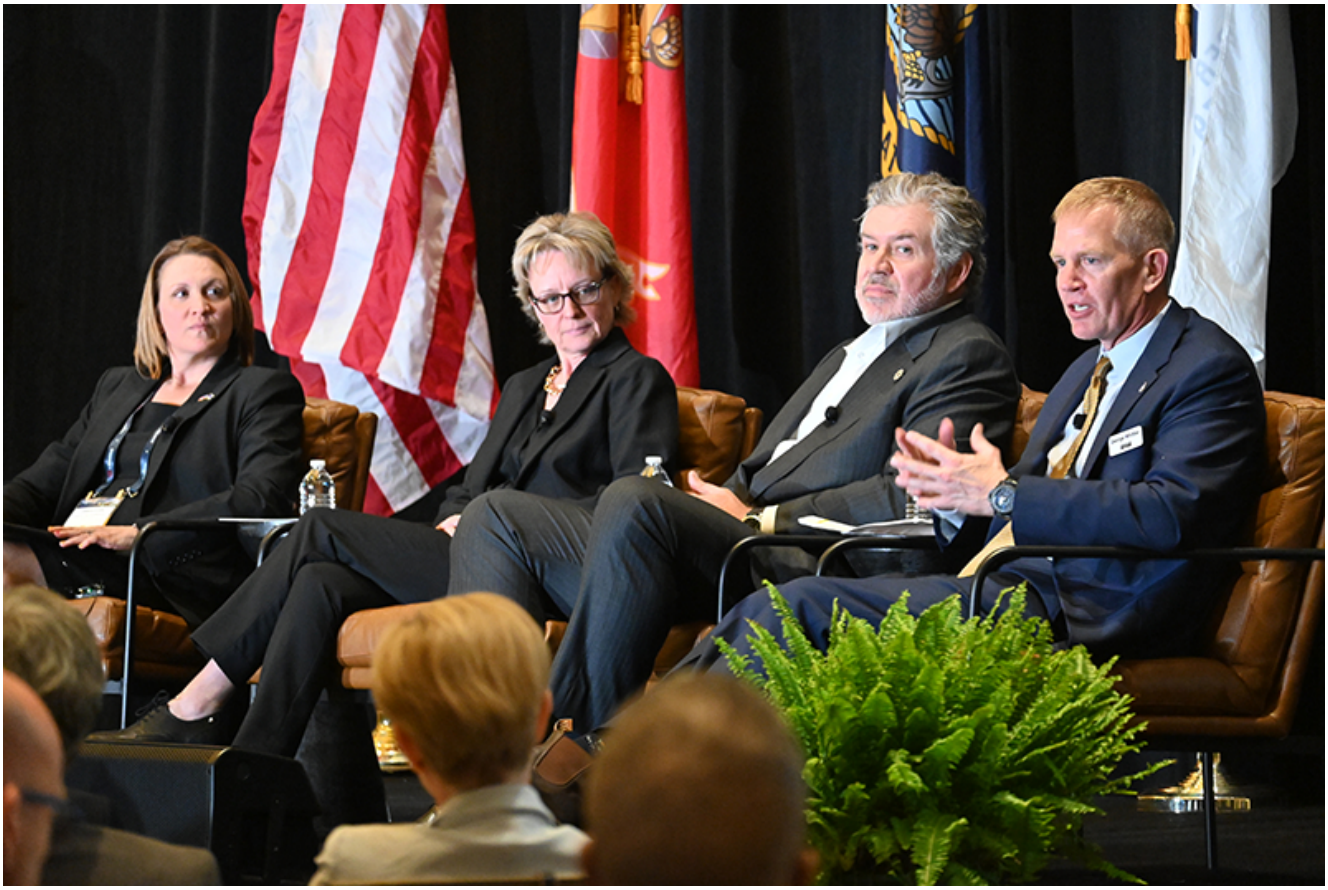
White House Commitment to Shipbuilding Sparks Industry Optimism



From left, Amber Stein, Kari Wilkinson, Ben Bordelon and George Whittier speak at the panel on Navy and Coast Guard shipbuilding. Credit: Brett Davis

By Erika Fitzpatrick, Seapower Correspondent

The White House's commitment to multiyear investments in new Navy ships, including the recently announced fiscal 2027 request of $65.8 billion for the Golden Fleet Initiative, is spurring changes in the shipbuilding industrial base, industry leaders said April 21 at Sea-Air-Space 2026.

The Pentagon's $1.5 trillion budget request would provide the Navy with more than $377 billion, a 24% increase over fiscal 2026 levels. Industry players, including George Whittier, CEO of Wisconsin-based Fairbanks Morse Defense (Booth 1337), a

U.S. Navy warship service and component provider and supplier, welcomed the budget details, also released Tuesday.

“Critically, the Pentagon said it would request multiyear authorities from Congress for long-running programs,” Whittier said in a statement. “Much of the nation’s strategic manufacturing capacity and technical expertise is in our maritime supplier base. This is exactly the kind of certainty the shipbuilding industrial base needs to thrive.”

Although shipbuilding manufacturers and suppliers now have confidence that pledged investments in sea power have a better chance to happen, Congress decides appropriations for the coming fiscal year, which begins Oct. 1, 2026.

Nevertheless, the budget visibility is helping manufacturers prepare for the massive workload in the pipeline, said Kari Wilkinson, executive vice president and president of Newport News Shipbuilding at HII (Booth 923).

“We have built submarine and carriers for many years, and we know we can do this,” she said. “We expect our customers to be demanding.

“It’s fundamentally about people,” Wilkinson said, including hiring, training and equipping personnel to fulfill orders. That requires changing the narrative that shipbuilding careers are unstable and distributing the workload to suppliers.

“It is a different landscape today than it has been, but that isn’t daunting,” she said. “This is a team sport.”

The administration’s emphasis on schedule – rapid delivery – is pushing shipbuilding to ramp up planning and workforce development, concurred Ben Bordelon, president and CEO at Louisiana-based Bollinger Shipyards.

Bollinger supports shipbuilding for the Navy and U.S. Coast Guard, which also received a cash infusion from Congress that’s led to a boom in icebreaker and cutter shipbuilding.

With these investments, the industry can now say to its talent pipeline that shipbuilding is sustained, profitable work. “We’re selling a career versus a job,” Bordelon said.