

'All of Our Programs Are a Mess,' SECNAV Said of Shipbuilding



By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Secretary of the Navy (SECNAV) told Congress that many major shipbuilding and other programs are behind schedule and above planned cost, and he is looking for possible long-term solutions to correct the situation and rebuild readiness for the challenges of the future.

“All of our programs are a mess, to be honest,” said Navy Secretary John C. Phelan, who was testifying June 11 on Capitol Hill before the House Armed Services Committee along with Chief of Naval Operations James W. Philby and General Eric M. Smith, commandant of the Marine Corps.

“We are behind schedule, over budget,” Phelan said. “Our best-

performing one [program] is six months late and 57% over budget. ... So, we are working very hard to get these fixed. The Navy has begun to make some rapid changes at the public shipyards, and we've been talking with Electric Boat and Huntington Ingalls [HII]."

Of particular concern to the SECNAV are the Columbia-class ballistic-missile submarines and Virginia-class submarines, both classes of which are behind schedule.

Schedule and cost issues also plague the Constellation-class frigate program, and some Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyers are behind schedule. Many amphibious warfare ships are in poor condition, Navy officials said.

"The United States Navy and Marine Corps are prepared and ready to fight and win, anytime and anywhere," Phelan said. "However, our naval superiority is under threat. For too long we have allowed our shipbuilding industry to erode, hollowing out the very capacity we need to maintain credible naval deterrence. That must change."

Phelan said he has had conversations with shipbuilders in South Korea, noting that a modern guided-missile destroyer built in South Korea – "10 5 bigger than ours" – cost one third that of its U.S. counterpart.

He said that rebuilding the maritime industrial base is a "national security imperative."