

Sea-Air-Space: USMC is Ready to be Tip of the Spear, but Needs Steady Funding, Smith Says



Commandant of the Marine Corps Eric Smith was the luncheon keynote speaker on April 7 at Sea-Air-Space. *Photo credit: Dan Goodrich*

The U.S. Marine Corps is expanding its expeditionary capability and investing heavily in neglected resources to improve its warfighting prowess and the lives and effectiveness of Marines, but unpredictable funding from Congress is making that difficult, the service's leader said April. 7.

U.S. Marine Corps Commandant General Eric Smith was the luncheon keynote speaker at Sea-Air-Space and described the tools and constructs the service is using to project forces.

“I’ll begin with what makes the Navy and Marine Corps team the premier expeditionary fighting force on the planet,” he said. And that is the ARG/MEU, the Amphibious Ready Group/Marine Expeditionary Unit. An Amphibious Ready Group with an embarked Marine Expeditionary Unit is the coin of the realm,” he said. “It’s the Swiss Army Knife of the DoD inventory.”

His top priority, he said, is restoring a “3.0 MEU presence worldwide.” That means one ARG/MEU off the East Coast, handling the Mediterranean and the coast of Africa, one off the West Coast, handling the Indo-Pacific, and the “episodic deployment” of a MEU out of Okinawa, Japan. Three such ARG/MEUs is the minimum, he said, while the demand signal is for 5.5.

MEUs include light infantry, artillery, light armored reconnaissance, combat aviation, combat service support, medical support and command and control, and “operate as one. They blend themselves into a chainmail fist,” he said.

The Amphib Fleet

One challenge for the Marines is reconstituting its amphibious ship fleet, which he said the USMC allowed to atrophy as it turned its attention to combat in Iraq in recent years.

“We didn’t look back at our amphibs,” he said. They weren’t maintained because they hadn’t been used in a decade, but “without those ships, Marines can’t get to the fight.”

The Corps has also been investing in equipment such as the AN/TPS-80 Ground/Air Task-Oriented Radar, or G/ATOR radar, and the Navy/Marine Corps Expeditionary Ship Interdiction System (NMESIS), a remotely operated missile battery, as well as MADIS, the Marine Air Defense Integrated System, which

provides the service's first organic air defense system.

"We used to be armed with a Stinger [missile], and that is not enough to get it done against the PRC," he said, referencing China.

Barracks Spending

The USMC is also moving to address longstanding issues with its infrastructure, namely rebuilding crumbling barracks as part of Barracks 2030, which Smith described as a "heavy lift" that will cost \$5 billion over the five-year defense program.

It's difficult to plan such long-term efforts – 11 barracks renovations were started last year with another dozen planned this year – without steady funding. Members of Congress are supportive of these and other efforts, Smith said, but the reliance on continuing resolutions instead of passing new funding bills causes problems.

"I'll stay out of politics," he said. "But I will say we need predictable, on-time funding that only Congress can provide. Meaning, continuing resolutions aren't continuing anything, they stop our progress."

Sea-Air-Space: Fighting from the MOC Requires Standardization, Speakers Say



Vice Admirals Kurt Thomas, Michael Vernazza and Craig Clapperton and Rear Admiral Susan Bryer-Joyner discuss what needs to be done to fight from the MOC. *Photo credit: Dan Goodrich*

The concept of “fighting from the MOC” will require much greater standardization of Maritime Operations Centers, in training, equipping, resupplying and data management and protection, speakers said at a panel April 7 at Sea-Air-Space.

The MOCs are purpose-built for fleet commanders, but that makes them difficult to coordinate, said Vice Admiral Karl Thomas, the director of Naval Intelligence, who moderated the Monday panel on “Fighting from the MOC.”

“We would like to have them all configured in a standard manner ... so we can modernize them in a better way,” Thomas said. “There’s a little tension in that, but it’s a good tension. In the pace of the fight today, we need to modernize.”

MOCs are how the Navy executes fleet-level warfare and facilitates mission command at lower echelons, but the Navy is

seeking to use them as the centerpiece for the type of distributed warfare likely in the vast Pacific.

“We will treat and resource MOCs like the warfighting systems that they are, capable of operating on a decentralized and global battlefield just like all other weapons systems,” the Navy’s 2024 Navigation Plan says.

Vice Admiral Michael Vernazza, commander of Naval Information Forces, said his team is working with Navy personnel officialsto conduct a manpower review of each MOC, starting in the Pacific, focusing on the exact manning each will need to carry out the seven joint tasks outlined in the chief of naval operation’s Navigation Plan.

“By 2027, all fleet headquarters, starting in the Pacific Fleet, will have ready MOCs certified and proficient in command and control, information, intelligence, fires, movement and maneuver, protection, and sustainment functions as assessed by our MOC Training Teams,” the NAVPLAN says.

Investments

Admiral Susan BryerJoyner, director of the Warfighting Integration Directorate, said the main investment that needs to be made to be ready for 2027 is cloud infrastructure and supporting “zero trust” technology to make sure data going into and from MOCs is protected, and available to commanders who need it.

Data visualization doesn’t need to be standard, “but what does need to be standard is the data that underpins it,” BryerJoyner said.

“Every commander should not be able to pick and choose what data he or she wants to use for a specific warfighting function, because as soon as you start to add that variability in, now different commanders are going to see different things and come to different conclusions,” she said.

“This shift from MOC as a commander’s personalized way of fighting to a more standardized way of feeding into the joint force, is the journey that we’re going on now,” she said.

Sea-Air-Space: Mad Science, Marine Mammal Medicine Highlight 7th STEM Expo



A young attendee at STEM Expo is excited to learn about science. *Photo credit: James Peterson*

Hundreds of energetic students packed into the RiverView Ballroom at the Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center for the seventh year of the STEM Expo to kick off Sea-Air-Space 2025.

The event featured more than three dozen exhibits to help interest students in grades five through 12 to pursue a STEM career. It also threw in a little fun from presentations by Mad Science, which delivers innovative, educational science demonstrations aimed at children, and the National Marine Mammal Foundation, which showcased the Navy's marine mammal program and let students get up close with an inflatable dolphin stand-in.

The STEM Expo drew not only students but high-level attendees from the sea service, including Chief of Naval Research Rear Admiral Kurt J. Rothenhaus.

"ONR is honored to be a part of this STEM event to get the word out to young folks around the country to think about a career in science, technology, engineering and mathematics," Rothenhaus said. "I'm excited to see the many industry partners out this afternoon as well as our Naval Research Lab, all here to inspire the next generation to help build the future."



The National Marine Mammal Foundation discussed how to keep Navy dolphins healthy. *Photo credit: James Peterson*

HII was the Champion Sponsor for the event and CACI sponsored the science stations.

Hands-on Fun

“In my section, we’re over there making a mess. We’re trying to teach them some buoyancy” by having students build small boats that carried weight, said HII’s William Abraira, a structural engineer at Newport News Shipbuilding, who works on submarine pressure hulls.

“We’re trying to explain water displacement to them but fun gets in the way and it quickly turns into a competition of who can hold the most marbles,” he said. “But it’s super important, it’s one of those basic principles in shipbuilding, and it just gets kids really excited.”

Perry Haymon, with HII’s Ingalls Shipbuilding, was helping hand out brightly colored plastic “hard hats” to students to emphasize the importance of safety.

“I work in research and development. So, I see the importance of those new things, those new technologies. To see young minds come in and get interested in what we do at the shipyard, as well as all of HII ... is very important to us. We enjoy coming and seeing the faces of young people,” he said. “There’s a lot of energy here, from the people coming in, just getting hard hats, and also seeing the other events that we’ve got going on, from welding to virtual reality, and also building a boat to see how much weight you can actually carry.”

CACI had set up a booth where children could design their own hovercraft from common materials and test them in a wind tunnel. “It’s been such a fun experience getting to watch them do it,” said Sidney Finkenbinder, a media relations specialist at CACI. “Make one, test it out, see what they can change and

make it better. That's what it's all about, getting to learn new things and try out new activities ... getting to see their faces

Phelan to Focus on Navy Recruiting, Shipbuilding



Sen. Roger Wicker, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, met with Secretary of the Navy nominee John Phelan in January. *Photo credit: Sen. Wicker's office.*

WASHINGTON – Businessman John Phelan, nominated by President Trump to be secretary of the Navy, appeared before the Senate Armed Services Committee on Feb. 27 and said he wants to focus on Navy recruitment and training, get shipbuilding back on track and set up an “accountable warfighting culture” is approved.

Sen. Roger Wicker (R-Mississippi), chairman of the committee, said Phelan had a “distinguished career in the private sector” although he has no Navy experience, and said “his background showcases his ability to manage complex business deals to drive efficiency and to deliver results. Our Navy will need someone with all three of those skills and more to get our

Navy back on the right track.”

“I understand why some question why a businessman who did not wear the uniform should lead the Navy,” Phelan said, pledging to “step outside the status quo and take decisive action with a results-oriented approach.”

Wicker’s first question to Phelan was what he would do to improve Navy recruiting. The service met its goals last year, he said, but “only by lowering standards. Last year, nearly 20% of Navy recruits were considered category IV – they tested below the 30th percentile on the military aptitude test.”

Phelan said some recruiting numbers have gone up, “which is a reflection of the president’s victory and return to the warfighting ethos,” and said he would take advantage of the upcoming 250th anniversary of the Navy to highlight the benefits of life in the service.

He also said the Navy should “do better from a digital perspective outreach” to young people, and take a page from the Marine Corps, which has worked with the same advertising company for three decades to build its brand.

Wicker said if Congress “threw a zillion dollars at the Navy” it still couldn’t build enough ships because the industrial base doesn’t have enough workers.

Phelan said he would visit the shipyards and spread best practices, including borrowing some from international shipyards, and also “telegraph demand” for shipbuilding to incentivize the private sector to invest in shipbuilding.

Echoing Wicker’s comment that some shipyard salaries are so low a welder could get the same salary working at a convenience store, Phelan said, “you can’t have those kinds of wage differentials for those kinds of jobs.”

Sen. Jack Reed (D-Rhode Island) asked about Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth's recent announcement that the Pentagon should be ready to cut 8% from the defense budget in each of the next five years in addition to laying off thousands of defense workers. Reed said such "disruptions" could jeopardize any gains the shipbuilders might make in recruiting workers.

Phelan said he is "not privy" to the details of the cuts, but "I do think the shipbuilding force is critical. If confirmed, will set with the secretary of defense and president and very quickly talk about that."

Later, he said he understood the potential cuts to be "a planning tool – where would we cut if we need to cut?" that would move resources from nonlethal to more lethal activities.

"Do I view the construction of submarines and ships as lethal? The answer is yes, because we need to have these ships and we need to get them out there quickly," he said.

Navy CNO Franchetti Fired



Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Lisa Franchetti presents an award to a Sailor at Naval Support Activity (NSA) Crane, in Crane, Indiana, Feb. 10, 2025. Photo Credit: U.S. Navy | Senior Chief Petty Officer Elliott Fabrizio

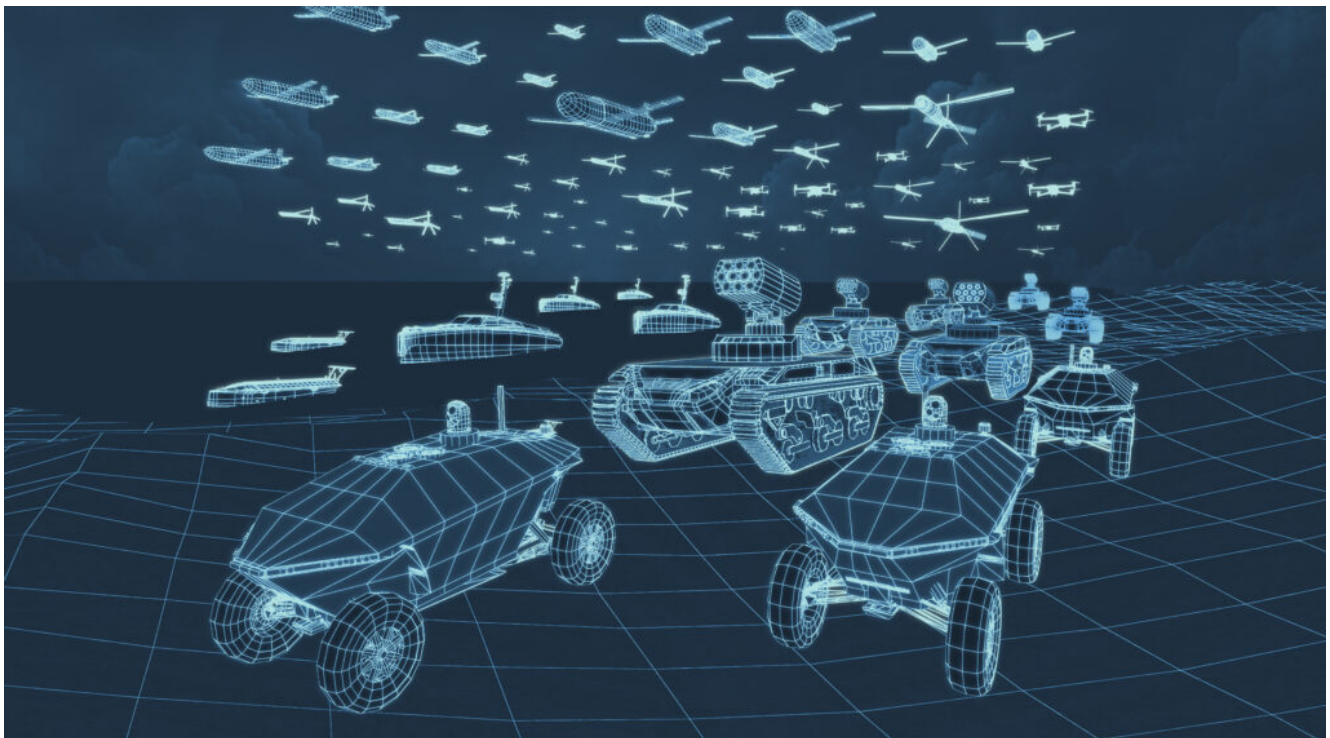
Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth announced he was firing Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Lisa Franchetti on Friday, the same day as he relieved Air Force General Charles Q. Brown as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, according to the New York Times.

According to the Times and other reports, Hegseth said Franchetti and Air Force General James Slife, the service's vice chief of staff, also fired, had "distinguished careers," and "we thank them for their service and dedication to our country."

Franchetti was the 33rd chief of naval operations, the first woman to be CNO and the first woman to serve on the Joint Chiefs of Staff. She entered the Navy after earning a degree in journalism at Northwestern University and joining the Naval ROTC program there.

She later commanded the destroyer USS Ross, commanded U.S. Naval forces in Korea, served as commander of the U.S. 6th Fleet in the Mediterranean and director of strategy, plans and policy for the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff.

L3Harris Unveils AMORPHOUS C2 Software



An L3Harris graphic illustrating the types of autonomous systems AMORPHOUS could control.

WASHINGTON – L3Harris has taken the wraps off AMORPHOUS, a new software that uses a single user interface to control thousands of autonomous, uncrewed platforms simultaneously, across all domains.

Officials from the Melbourne, Florida-based company briefed reporters on Amorphous on Feb. 6 in Washington, where they also purchased public advertising touting the new system.

AMORPHOUS stands for Autonomous Multi-domain Operations Resiliency Platform for Heterogenous Unmanned Systems and includes a distributed command-and-control interface.

“Autonomy is a force multiplier, which is why we have designed AMORPHOUS as a multi-domain, multi-mission capability that rapidly integrates a variety of uncrewed systems across the battlespace,” said Jon Rambeau, president of L3Harris’ Integrated Mission Systems. “This project also highlights L3Harris’ partnerships with venture-backed and non-traditional companies to mature emerging defense capabilities more quickly and affordably.”

L3Harris is currently developing prototypes using the AMORPHOUS architecture on contracts for the U.S. Army and the Defense Innovation Unit. The company has demonstrated the system’s flexibility and interoperability by controlling multiple, separate assets across multiple vehicle types operating in different domains during government-managed tests.

The software allows one operator to oversee multiple platforms, which can make their own decisions within the network – for instance, if one drone is damaged or lost, the others in a swarm can adjust formations to compensate.

Although the system has just been publicly revealed, Rambeau and Toby Magsig, the vice president and general manager of Enterprise Autonomous Solutions, said AMORPHOUS is under “multiple contracts” to military customers.

And, although it has so far controlled a few systems, it is aimed at being able to control and oversee thousands, they said.

To do that at speed, AMORPHOUS relies on what Magsig called “thin messages,” akin to SMS text message on a phone, to communicate at speed with dispersed systems in multiple domains. The system could be used for counter-UAS operations;

intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance and targeting; swarming kinetic effects; electromagnetic spectrum operations and even autonomous breaching.

“All the services are asking for the same thing,” Magsig said. “This is not service specific.”

Underwater systems have traditionally posed communications problems, and Magsig was vague on how the company has addressed and possibly overcome them, saying when it comes to the underwater domain, “what happens there needs to stay there.”

Rambeau said AMORPHOUS is open architecture and platform and sensor agnostic, and training time can be very short due to its intuitive interface.

President Trump Removes Coast Guard Commandant



Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Linda Fagan salutes the national ensign while embarking U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Calhoun (WMSL 759), April 20, 2024, following the cutter's official commissioning in North Charleston, South Carolina. *Photo credit: U.S. Coast Guard | Petty Officer 2nd Class Brandon Hillard*

President Trump's new administration has removed Admiral Linda L. Fagan as commandant of the Coast Guard, an early end to the tenure of the first female to head a U.S. military branch.

The removal, on Trump's first full day back in office, was first reported by Fox News, which said Acting Homeland Security Secretary Benjamin Huffman removed Fagan. Admiral Kevin Lunday, the vice commandant, is now the acting commandant.

"She was terminated because of her leadership deficiencies, operational failures, and inability to advance the strategic objectives of the U.S. Coast Guard," a senior Department of Homeland Security official told *Seapower* in a statement.

The list of reasons includes failure to address threats at the

southern border, “especially in interdicting fentanyl and other illicit substances” and “insufficient coordination with the Department of Homeland Security to prioritize operations along maritime borders.”

It also includes “inadequate leadership” in recruitment and retention; persistent cost overruns in icebreakers and helicopter programs; “inadequate accountability for acquisition failures highlighted during the Trump 45 Administration;” the “mishandling and coverup of Operation Fouled Anchor,” an investigation into sexual harassment at the Coast Guard Academy and in the service; and “excessive focus on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) policies including at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, diverting resources and attention from operational imperatives.”

Fagan was the Coast Guard’s first four-star admiral and was confirmed as commandant in 2022.

Rep. Joe Courtney (D-Connecticut), ranking member of the House Armed Services Committee’s Seapower and Projection Forces subcommittee, posted on X that Fagan’s dismissal “is an abuse of power that slanders her good name and outstanding record. Under Admiral Fagan, Coast Guard recruitment is up, not down, and drug interdictions too. Trump’s fecklessness harms morale and confidence in the chain of command.”

On Jan. 21, the Coast Guard released a statement attributed to Lunday, which said, “Per the president’s executive orders, I have directed my operational commanders to immediately surge assets – cutters, aircraft, boats and deployable specialized forces – to increase Coast Guard presence and focus starting with the following key areas:

- The southeast U.S. border approaching Florida to deter and prevent a maritime mass migration from Haiti and/or Cuba;
- The maritime border around Alaska, Hawai’i, the U.S.

territories of Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, American Samoa, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands;

- The maritime border between the Bahamas and south Florida;
- The southwest maritime border between the U.S. and Mexico in the Pacific;
- The maritime border between Texas and Mexico in the Gulf of America; and
- Support to Customs and Border Protection on maritime portions of the southwest U.S. border.

Together, in coordination with our Department of Homeland Security and Department of Defense teammates, we will detect, deter and interdict illegal migration, drug smuggling and other terrorist or hostile activity before it reaches our border.”

Navy, Industry Working to Surge Capability as 2027 Draws Closer



Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Lisa Franchetti participates in a Q&A session moderated by retired Vice Adm. Richard Hunt at the Surface Navy Association National Symposium in Arlington, Virginia, Jan. 14, 2025. *Photo credit: U.S. Navy | Senior Chief Mass Communication Specialist Elliott Fabrizio*

As the U.S. military braces for a potential conflict with China in 2027, maritime defense and industry leaders alike are trying to get the most out of the existing fleet while planning for a more capable future fleet with a mix of manned and uncrewed platforms.

“The countdown clock in my office continues to tick away and it tells me when I walked in today that there are 716 days left until 1 January, 2027. There is no time to waste,” Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Lisa M. Franchetti said this week at the Surface Navy Association’s annual symposium, referring to a year when Chinese President Xi Jinping has reportedly told his generals to be ready for war.

“The People’s Republic of China is our pacing challenge and presents a complex multi-domain and multi access threat,”

Franchetti said. "And I'm eyes wide open that the challenge posed by the PRC to our Navy goes well beyond just the size of the PLAN [People's Liberation Army Navy] fleet. It includes gray zone and economic campaigns, expansion of dual use infrastructure like airfield and dual use forces like the Chinese maritime militia and a growing nuclear arsenal."

To counter that, and guard against the expected threat to Taiwan, Franchetti said she needs a larger fleet and one with more robotic and automated systems from programs such as the Replicator initiative, the rapid development effort NavalX and the Disruptive Capabilities Office.

From the Russian invasion of Ukraine to the Houthis in the Red Sea, "we are seeing the increase in use and effective adaptation of robotic and autonomous systems in every domain," she said. "It's abundantly clear that we need to both have these capabilities and have the capability to defeat 'em kinetically and non kinetically ... the future of war at sea is neither fully robotic nor fully manned."

Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro, in his last address as SECNAV to the Surface Navy Association, agreed.

"...Our challenge is not only about maintaining naval superiority, but also ensuring that the U.S. military is prepared to confront the evolving threats that are opposed by the People's Republic of China, especially in the realms of advanced technology, maritime claims, and military modernization," he said. "Much like President Kennedy's recognition of the need for modernized nuclear deterrent, today's Navy and Marine Corps must continue to adopt, leveraging both man and unmanned capabilities to counter the PRC's growing naval and technological advances."

Admiral Daryl Caudle, commander of Fleet Forces Command, has the job of training and equipping the fleets that will need to contain China's potential military expansion.

“The speed of modern warfare, combined with ever-shrinking indications and warnings windows, means we won’t have the luxury of long lead times to bring the full capabilities of our fleet to bear,” Caudle said in his keynote address to the SNA.

“Every day, about 100 [U.S. Navy] ships are deployed around the globe. Furthermore, about 100 ships are in lengthy depot maintenance availabilities that would take weeks, if not months, to close out just by buttoning up all the existing work and returning systems to service. This leaves the last 100 ships that are not deployed nor in depot, and the question – can we do more with those ships to make them ready to flow into combat? The answer is hell yes, and we are,” Caudle said.

That includes making use of the Combat Surge Ready certification for ships, a formal process and designation for getting ships on the Response Plan watchbill.

Efforts like the ongoing Shipyard Infrastructure Optimization Program, or SIOP, won’t add a lot of ship mass to the Navy by 2027, Caudle said, but the combat surge effort can up those numbers in the short term.

“When we sustain 80% Combat Surge Ready or better for all ships not in depot maintenance, the number of platforms ready to surge and flow into combat step-increases from around 100 to 180,” Caudle said. “...The goal of sustaining 80% Combat Surge Ready will require some new ways of thinking and may be uncomfortable for some, but we know our force structure will certainly not change between now and 2027 and will not significantly change over the next decade. Bottom Line: We must be constantly making ready ships not in depot or currently deployed.”

Industry Efforts

Getting more ships to the fleet requires having a large, well-trained workforce, something the maritime industry has been

struggling with in recent years.

Christopher Kastner, CEO of shipbuilding giant HII, sat down with reporters on the eve of the SNA symposium to discuss how his company is trying to attract more workers, particularly more experienced ones, and dealing with an “almost arthritic” supply chain.

One way is by buying relevant suppliers. HII announced in December it has agreed to buy W International SC and Vivid Empire SC, South Carolina metal fabricators specializing in building structures, modules and assemblies for shipbuilders.

“We did that simply to increase capacity and increase throughput,” Kastner said. “We’re going to where the labor is, right? ... We’re expanding into Texas, Louisiana, we’ve expanded in Norfolk, Virginia. You see this expansion in South Carolina. We’re going to where the labor is.”

Paying better wages for the shipbuilding workforce is also key, he said, and the Navy has taken steps to help do that for the submarine industrial base. It’s a key effort at a time when the gap between shipbuilding work and less demanding retail work has narrowed, making it harder to attract new workers.

“I definitely think there’s momentum, there’s recognition by the Navy, as you saw on the [defense budget] supplemental, that they want to address wages in the submarine industrial base. I don’t think it should be limited at the submarine industrial base, and it should be all of shipbuilding, [we] should be able to adjust wages to attract and increase talent into the industry.”

President Carter's Funeral Procession in Washington Reflects Navy Roots



Carter's horse-drawn caisson on its way to the U.S. Capitol. *Photo credit: Brett Davis*

WASHINGTON – President James Earl “Jimmy” Carter Jr.’s final procession through Washington started Jan. 7 at the U.S. Navy Memorial, where his casket was loaded onto a horse-drawn caisson for transportation to the Capitol where he is lying in state.

The 39th president of the United States had requested the transfer be made at the Navy Memorial as he planned his own funeral. He will lie in state until Thursday, when the state funeral will be held at the Washington National Cathedral.

Carter, who passed away in December at age 100, was the fifth

consecutive president with prior Navy service, according to the U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command. He received an appointment to the academy and became a member of the class of 1947, although he completed an accelerated wartime program and graduated in 1946, commissioning as an ensign.

He served first on the USS Wyoming, a battleship that had been converted to a floating laboratory for testing new electronics and gunnery equipment, according to the command.

After two years of surface ship duty, Carter applied for submarine duty and was assigned to the USS Pomfret and later the USS K-1, and in 1952 joined the new program to create nuclear-powered submarines. According to the Naval History and Heritage Command, Carter served with the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission's Naval Reactors Branch, aiding in the design and development of nuclear propulsion for Navy ships and submarines.

Carter was preparing to become the engineering officer for the nuclear powerplant for the USS Seawolf (SSN 575), one of the first nuclear-powered subs, and helped set up training for the enlisted Sailors who would serve on the boat.

However, his father, James Earl Carter, passed away, and Carter resigned from the Navy to return to Georgia to manage the family peanut farm and, eventually, to launch his political career.



A Navy honor guard marched in the procession for Carter's lying in state at the Capitol. *Photo credit: Brett Davis*
His naval roots were never forgotten, and the Seawolf-class USS Jimmy Carter (SSN 23) is named for him, as is an academic hall at the U.S. Naval Academy.

"His legacy and beliefs are imbued in the Sailors that set sail aboard the USS Jimmy Carter and walk the halls of the newly renamed Carter Hall at the United States Naval Academy," Admiral Lisa Franchetti, the chief of naval operations, said in a statement upon Carter's death.

"President Carter's life of service will continue to be an example for us and help us navigate our course. His work is finished, but the U.S. Navy's work continues. President Carter, we have the watch."

Lawmakers Introduce SHIPS Act to Revitalize Shipbuilding, Commercial Maritime Industries



U.S. Merchant Marine Academy graduates throw their covers in celebration during the Merchant Marine Academy Commencement Ceremony in Kings Point, New York, June 22, 2024. *Credit: U.S. Marine Corps | Staff Sgt. Kelsey Dornfeld*

A bipartisan group of U.S. Senators and Representatives on Dec. 19 introduced the Shipbuilding and Harbor Infrastructure for Prosperity and Security (SHIPS) for America Act, comprehensive legislation to revitalize the United States shipbuilding and commercial maritime industries.

The SHIPS for America Act was introduced by Sens. Mark Kelly (D-Arizona) and Todd Young (R-Indiana) and Reps. John Garamendi (D-California) and Trent Kelly (R-Mississippi). After decades of neglect, the United States has a weakened shipbuilding capacity, a declining commercial shipping fleet dwarfed by China and a diminished ability to supply the U.S. military during wartime, the lawmakers said.

They said the bipartisan proposal would restore American leadership across the oceans by establishing national oversight and consistent funding for U.S. maritime policy, incentivizing domestic shipbuilding, enabling U.S.-flagged vessels to better compete in international commerce, rebuilding the U.S. shipyard industrial base and expanding the mariner and shipyard workforce.

“We’ve always been a maritime nation, but the truth is we’ve lost ground to China, who now dominates international shipping and can build merchant and military ships much more quickly

than we can,” said Kelly, a U.S. Navy veteran and the first U.S. Merchant Marine Academy graduate to serve in Congress.

“The SHIPS for America Act is the answer to this challenge. By supporting shipbuilding, shipping, and workforce development, it will strengthen supply chains, reduce our reliance on foreign vessels, put Americans to work in good-paying jobs, and support the Navy and Coast Guard’s shipbuilding needs. I’m excited to introduce this comprehensive, fully paid for legislation today alongside my Republican and Democratic colleagues and our partners representing all parts of the industry, and together we’re going to work to get this effort across the finish line.”

“America has been a maritime nation since our founding, and seapower was a significant contributor to our rise to being the most powerful nation on earth. Unfortunately, the bottom line now is America needs more ships. Shipbuilding is a national security priority and a stopgap against foreign threats and coercion. Our bill will revitalize the U.S. maritime industry, grow our shipbuilding capacity, rebuild America’s shipyard industrial base, and support nationwide workforce development in this industry. This legislation is critical to our warfighting capabilities and keeping pace with China,” Young said.

The move drew support from a wide variety of maritime-related groups and is backed by the Navy League of the United States.

“The Navy League applauds the introduction of the SHIPS for America Act, a landmark legislative achievement that will comprehensively meet the needs of the U.S. merchant marine and bolster our shipbuilding industrial base,” said Mike Stevens, CEO of the Navy League.

“In today’s global threat environment, arguably the most perilous since the end of the Cold War, the United States must not only maintain the finest Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast

Guard on the seas, but also ensure a robust U.S.-flag merchant marine and a resilient shipbuilding industrial base. These elements are crucial for safeguarding our national and economic security in the event of large-scale military conflict. The SHIPS for America Act addresses these vital considerations and reaffirms that America is, and always will be, a maritime nation.”

The SHIPS for America Act would:

Coordinate U.S. maritime policy by establishing the position of Maritime Security Advisor within the White House, who would lead an interagency Maritime Security Board tasked with making whole-of-government strategic decisions for how to implement a National Maritime Strategy. The bill also establishes a Maritime Security Trust Fund that would reinvest duties and fees paid by the maritime industry into maritime security programs and infrastructure supporting maritime commerce.

Establish a national goal of expanding the U.S.-flag international fleet by 250 ships in 10 years by creating the Strategic Commercial Fleet Program, which would facilitate the development of a fleet of commercially operated, U.S.-flagged, American crewed, and domestically built merchant vessels that can operate competitively in international commerce.

Enhance the competitiveness of U.S.-flagged vessels in international commerce by establishing a Rulemaking Committee on Commercial Maritime Regulations and Standards to cut through the U.S. Coast Guard’s bureaucracy and red tape that limits the international competitiveness of U.S.-flagged vessels, requiring that government-funded cargo move aboard U.S.-flag vessels, and requiring a portion of commercial goods imported from China to move aboard U.S.-flag vessels starting in 2029.

Expand the U.S. shipyard industrial base, for both military and commercial oceangoing vessels, by establishing a 25

percent investment tax credit for shipyard investments, transforming the Title XI Federal Ship Financing Program into a revolving fund, and establishing a Shipbuilding Financial Incentives program to support innovative approaches to domestic ship building and ship repair.

Accelerate U.S. leadership in next-generation ship design, manufacturing processes, and ship energy systems by establishing the U.S. Center for Maritime Innovation, which would create regional hubs across the country.

Make historic investments in maritime workforce by establishing a Maritime and Shipbuilding Recruiting Campaign, allowing mariners to retain their credentials through a newly established Merchant Marine Career Retention Program, investing in long-overdue infrastructure needs for the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy, and supporting State Maritime Academies and Centers for Excellence for Domestic Maritime Workforce Training and Education. The bill also would streamline and modernize the U.S. Coast Guard's Merchant Mariner Credentialing system.