

Congressmen: Shipyard Improvements Will Continue to Lag With Proposed Budget



Reps. Joe Courtney and Rob Wittman, speaking at “The Future of Shipbuilding: A Congressional Discussion” panel, said it is “unacceptable” that it will take 10 years to modernize public shipyards with current budget plans. *LISA NIPP*

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. – A major solution to the U.S. Navy’s chronic problems of building new ships and maintaining existing vessels is to make extensive and rapid improvements in its public shipyards and to encourage similar investments in the private yards, the bipartisan leaders of the House Armed Services Shipbuilding and Projection Forces Subcommittee said April 4.

With the level of funding to modernize the public yards in the newly released fiscal 2023 defense budget and in the long-term proposed spending, it would take 10 years to make any real improvement, subcommittee chairman Rep. Joe Courtney (D-Connecticut) and ranking member Rep. Rob Wittman (R-Virginia) said at the Navy League’s Sea-Air-Space 2022 exposition. That is unacceptable, the two lawmakers said.

Asked by the session moderator if there is a need for a new public yard, the two lawmakers were not sure if that was required, or obtainable. Improving the facilities at the public yards would also help with the growing problem of retaining the current workforce and attracting a new generation of worker, they said.

They also called for more investment in support for the shipbuilding industrial base as a whole, noting the recent addition of funds for the submarine supplier base, primarily focused on the urgent requirement to keep the Columbia-class

ballistic missile subs on a tight schedule to replace the aged Ohio-class boomers.

Both men bemoaned the continuing delay in procuring replacements for the ancient sealift fleet, some ships of which are nearly World War II vintage. Wittman said that program must include new-build ships as well as converted retired commercial merchant ships. He insisted those U.S. built ships could be obtained for an acceptable price.

They also objected to the Navy budget proposal to stop construction of the San Antonio class of large amphibious ships and to delay start of the light amphibious warship program, which the Marine Corps is asking for. The Marines need both types of amphibs, they said.