Navy Budget Admiral: Topline a Challenge for New Ship Programs

Rear Adm. John E. Gumbleton gives remarks at a press conference in the Port of Los Angeles, March 27, 2020. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class David Mora Jr.*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy is facing a bow wave of fiscal challenges as it launches or proceeds new major ship, aircraft and shipyard programs as it seeks to build the fleet the nation needs, the Navy's budget director said.

"The elephant in the room is, of course the availability of funding," said Rear Adm. John Gumbleton, deputy assistant secretary of the Navy for Budget (FMB) and director, Fiscal Management Division, N82, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, speaking in a webinar sponsored by the Navy League of the United States and Huntington Ingalls Industries and moderated by Dr. Jerry Hendrix, a retired Navy captain and vice president of the Telemus Group.

"Here we are in 2021, and we're looking at our Columbia-class [ballistic-missile submarine] coming on line, consuming large values in R&D [research and development] as well as our SCN [Ship Construction, Navy] appropriation; and at the same time trying to invest in the next large surface combatant R&D [DDGX], SSNX [Next-Generation Attack Submarine] R&D, and also the Next-Generation Air Dominance at the same time," Gumbleton said. "[Plus] the extra 'bonus' of trying to recapitalize our century-old dry dock facilities, so, essentially, reinvesting in a modern shipyard.

"All these are Navy challenges and our cross to bear so to speak, but, in a capital-intensive service, where you're trying to keep production of destroyers, frigates, aircraft

carriers [going], it just speaks to the enormous challenge of trying to do this in a smart fashion within a topline granted," the admiral said.

Asked about the Navy's force structure – which currently is a subject of a Defense Department global force review – Gumbleton said a range in the number ships may be more useful for planning rather than a fixed number.

"Any plan – you put any number out there, is guaranteed to be wrong," he said. "It is helpful to say, 'How precise can we be?' We introduce the capabilities that these platforms may need to bring to bear and what type of mix – manned or unmanned, etc. – and what that might mean to a future force structure. An incredibly complex effort. I think a range speaks to the assumptions that underly any study. So, if we were to assume that we were going to have a manned/unmanned mix, that they have very different capabilities, that implies that there might be a future state where this range can reflect what choices we take with those assumptions."