

Senator Introduces Legislation to Boost Shipbuilding Toward 355- Vessel Fleet



A crane moves the lower stern into place on the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS John F. Kennedy under construction at Newport News Shipbuilding in Virginia in 2017. U.S. Navy/John Whalen

WASHINGTON – Roger Wicker, a senior member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, on Feb. 6 introduced the Securing the Homeland by Increasing our Power on the Seas (SHIPS) Implementation Act, according to his office.

The legislation follows the Mississippi Republican's 2017 SHIPS Act, which was signed by President Trump, making it U.S. policy to reach a 355-ship Navy. The new act would authorize the use of multiple cost-saving measures and direct the Navy to procure 39 new ships over the next four fiscal years.

“Our nation’s Navy is still the envy of the world, but our adversaries are quickly catching up,” Wicker said. “It is time for Congress to get serious about investing in our fleet and give our Sailors and Marines the tools they need to stay ahead of those who wish us harm.”

“In the near term, [the act] would empower our Navy to reach its 355-ship goal by authorizing the procurement of specific vessels and cutting costs. Over time, my proposal would help to decrease risk for the Navy and provide greater certainty for the industrial base.”

The Navy’s 355-ship goal is the direct result of a Navy-wide

“force structure assessment” from 2016 that solicited inputs from all regional commands about their current and projected needs. These projections included a recognition that the U.S. would need to significantly increase the size and capability of the Navy to counter growing threats from China and Russia.

In response to this assessment, Wicker introduced the 2017 SHIPS act. Even with a reinvigorated shipbuilding effort over the last three years, the Navy’s shipbuilding budget still falls between \$4 billion and \$5 billion short of the level required to reach a 355-ship Navy.

Wicker’s SHIPS Implementation Act would expand his 2017 legislation by providing a strategic framework and additional support to help the Navy reach its fleet goal.

Among other provisions, the act would:

- Direct the Navy to start construction on at least 12 Arleigh Burke-class destroyers, 10 Virginia-class submarines, two Columbia-class submarines, three San Antonio-class amphibious ships, one LHA-class amphibious ship, six John Lewis-class fleet oilers and five guided missile frigates across fiscal 2021-2025.
- Authorize the award of shipbuilding contracts for three San Antonio-class amphibious ships, one America-class amphibious ship, two Columbia-class submarines and six John Lewis-class fleet oilers in fiscal 2021.
- Recognize the strategic value of the Columbia-class submarine program by authorizing the use of the National Sea-Based Deterrence Fund to support the program with funds over and above the Navy’s shipbuilding budget.
- Introduce stability to the Navy’s acquisition process by requiring steady shipbuilding rates to be maintained for each vessel class.

- Authorize the use of several cost-saving measures, including multiyear or block buy contract authorities when appropriate.
- Minimize risk for the Navy by requiring shipbuilding prototyping to occur at the subsystem-level in advance of ship design, to the maximum extent practicable.