



Chairman Rodney Frelinghuysen

Subcommittee on Defense, House Committee on Appropriations

Fiscal Year 2016 Budget Hearing - Navy and Marine Corps
February 26, 2015
Opening Statement As Prepared

The subcommittee will come to order. This morning the subcommittee begins a series of defense posture and budget hearings with our military services, our combatant commands and other major components of our armed forces.

In this time of rapidly expanding threats to our national security, our goal in these hearings - and our FY '16 bill - is to make sure that our troops (and their families) have the resources they need to execute their assigned missions.

At the same time, in an era of constrained budgets, we must make sure that “every dollar counts.”

This morning, we hold an open hearing on the budget request of the Department of the Navy. We welcome the leadership team of the Navy and Marine Corps: the Secretary of the Navy, Ray Mabus, and, for the last time testifying as Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Jonathan Greenert.

I also welcome back to the Committee, although for the first time in his capacity as Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Joe Dunford.

I'm sure I speak for every Member of this subcommittee in thanking you for your valuable service to our great nation and those you command.

Gentlemen, the business at hand is the President's fiscal year 2016 budget request. Unfortunately, the variable that will have the biggest impact on your budget next year and for years to come is not actually a part of this request.

Unless there is a dramatic legislative change, the law of the land requires the Appropriations Committee to mark up bills this year to the level dictated by the Budget Control Act – the BCA.

In the case of the Department of Defense, I expect our allocation to be approximately \$34 billion below the President's request.

Since this is the first of our hearings, I am going to take a point of privilege to discuss my personal outlook and the realities facing our country.

Over the next few weeks, the American people will be hearing a great deal about the so-called “sequester” - a concept born decades ago and only revived in recent years.

While it sounds like a lot of procedural jargon to the taxpayer, sequester will have serious ramifications for our troops and our national security.

That is precisely why we will be hearing from our witnesses today - and in the weeks to come - about how an additional \$34 billion sequester cut next year will harm our defense capabilities in an era of expanding threats.

And yet, the President is threatening to precipitate that very sequester by sending up a budget that ignores that the law – the Budget Control Act.

For the record, I agree the law needs to be modified to avoid dramatic negative consequences to our ability to protect our homeland and our allies abroad.

But let us also be very clear that sequester alone is not the problem here.

- After all, the sequester did not create the existing security climate that reflects indecision, hesitation or ambivalence in our defense and foreign policy.
- Sequester did not create ISIS - that depraved barbaric force that grew as a result of our premature, politically-motivated withdrawal from Iraq.
- Sequester is not responsible for over 200,000 deaths in Syria, or millions of refugees throughout the Middle East
- Sequester had nothing to with the President's public declaration that the United States is no longer on a “war footing”.
- Sequester did not prompt Vladimir Putin to ignite a new Cold War by ignoring the sovereignty of his neighbor; Ukraine.
- Sequester did not lead us to “liberate” Libya and then turn our back while the country devolved into a dangerous breeding ground for terrorists.
- Sequester did not reduce our Navy to the smallest number of ships in recent memory, create the oldest Air Force in its history nor threaten to bring our Army’s end strength down to pre-World War 2 levels.

Again, I recognize that sequester is a clear threat to our security. However, I am bound to “follow the law” until instructed otherwise.

Now back to our Navy specifically:

At approximately \$13 billion above the level the Navy would be allocated at the BCA level, the Department will certainly have to bear a sizable portion of any reduction.

So I need to say right up-front that we all need to work extremely closely together to ensure the funding you are appropriated is sufficient to take care of our sailors and Marines and maintain your readiness at the highest possible level.

But it bears repeating: barring some dramatic change in course, this Subcommittee will mark up an FY '16 bill that is in compliance with the BCA. Of course, we'd like to have your input. With respect, I advise you that we WILL cut \$13 billion WITH you. Or we will cut \$13 billion WITHOUT you.

Having said that, I remain concerned with the core of the Navy – ships and the shipbuilding program.

Mr. Secretary, you have told us that since you've been in office, the Navy has awarded a large number of ship construction contracts. (And this Committee has been supportive of funding for surface ships and submarines.)

While that is admirable, the stark reality is that your fleet size has fluctuated around 280 over the last several years - far short of your stated requirement of 304 ships.

While the Navy continues to promise us more ships in the “outyears”, those “outyears” always seem to slip further out.

- A few short years ago, the Navy was projecting a fleet size of 313 ships in 2016.
- Last year you predicted that the Navy would reach and exceed your ship requirement sometime in fiscal year 2019.
- This year, you project that you will achieve the elusive 304 ship fleet in 2020.

For the welfare of our nation's defense, we need to come to grips with the resources available to us and settle on a plan.

You have heard me say this before: when it comes to ships - numbers matter!

In addition to the quantity of ships, I'm concerned with the mix of ships – submarines, surface combatants, amphibs, support ships - and how they are operated and maintained. More and more of your ships are not being operated by your sailors, but by civilian mariners. In fact, even your newly minted “fast frigates” - the vessels formerly known as Littoral Combat Ships - don't deploy without two permanently assigned civilian contractors.

The Subcommittee also wants to hear your assessment of the conventional and unconventional threats posed by China, Russia and Iran.

Gentlemen – this former Army draftee sees troubled waters ahead. Sequestration looms large over the Navy and we owe it to our sailors, Marines and citizens to develop the best solutions possible.

I can promise you that this subcommittee will work hard alongside each of you to ensure our Navy and Marine Corps are ready and able to be “where it matters, when it matters”.

I look forward to your comments and an informative question and answer session.

Your written testimony will be entered into the record so feel free to summarize your statement this morning.

Now, having said all that, let me turn to my good friend, Ranking Member Pete Visclosky for any comments he may want to make.

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