

STATEMENT OF
BRADLEY BYRNE (AL-1)
MEMBER OF CONGRESS
BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON DEFENSE
ON
15 MARCH 2016

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Frelinghuysen, Ranking Member Visclosky, distinguished members of the committee; it is my pleasure to appear before you today to testify on two topics important to our national security: the Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) program and the Expeditionary Fast Transport (EPF) program, formerly known as the Joint High Speed Vessel.

I appreciate the Committee's past support of these two critical programs. Unfortunately, this lame- duck administration is yet again attempting to disrupt these programs while ignoring the stated needs and goals of our Navy.

LITTORAL COMBAT SHIP

Under the directive of Secretary Carter and codified in the release of the President's Fiscal Year 2017 budget, the Navy is taking actions to decrease the number of LCS, or Frigates, from 52 total ships down to 40 and require a down select to a single shipyard in Fiscal Year 2019.

The sudden and unexpected reduction from 52 to 40 ships proposed by the Administration will undoubtedly increase the cost of these ships.

The President's proposed budget increases the cost of each ship by roughly 20%, according to the Congressional Budget Office. By taking this drastic step, the Navy will actually be causing the cost of these ships to increase at the precise moment they are moving into serial production – the point at which the Navy will actually begin seeing a return on the investment made to date.

Two years ago, the Office of the Secretary of Defense paused the LCS program for about 9 months to allow the Navy to conduct an in depth analysis of the requirements to implement the Secretary of Defense's directive to increase the lethality and survivability of the LCS as it transitioned to the Frigate. This analysis validated the need for 52 LCS/Frigates and maintained the dual supplier strategy with Austal USA in Mobile, Alabama and Marinette Marine in Marinette, Wisconsin.

This plan met the Navy's requirements for 52 ships, reduced cost through competition between two yards, and ensured stability in the industrial base.

As you likely know, the Department of Defense and the Navy have publicly been at odds about the future of these programs. The need for these ships was highlighted last month at an Armed Service Committee hearing when Secretary Stackley, the head of U.S. Naval acquisitions, stated the requirement for these vessels remains 52. Secretary Stackley also stated there was no Navy analysis indicating anything but a 52 ship requirement. Any reduction would create gaps in our small surface combatants that are an important tool for our operational commanders.

The LCS is an essential component of our fleet, and it is critical if the Navy is to support the Pentagon's pivot to the Asia-Pacific region. The LCS has proven its utility in the region by routinely accessing places other, larger surface ships cannot get to in that very important part of the

world. Just last month, in testimony before the Armed Services Committee, Admiral Harris, the PACOM Commander, called the LCS a “terrific platform to work with our allies and partners in the region.” The Secretary of the Navy has also repeatedly outlined his strong support for the LCS program and the need for 52 ships.

The LCS has adhered to stringent contractual and budgetary constraints and is locked into fixed price contracts at a congressionally mandated cost cap. The LCS program, has seen costs decreases over time and ships today are being built at a total appropriations cost of \$475 million per hull, well under the Cost Cap.

We also need to be clear about the dangers posed by a down select from two shipyards to one. This would in all likelihood put one of the shipyards out of business and be devastating for the industrial base we have worked so hard to build up.

It has also become abundantly clear that delaying the production of the LCS would significantly reduce the size of our fleet and damage America's national security. In turn, this would force the Navy to cover the same geographic area with significantly fewer assets.

Because of these considerations, I ask the Subcommittee to support the funding necessary to procure three Littoral Combat Ships in this year's budget.

JOINT HIGH SPEED VESSEL

Next, I'd like to share my support for the Expeditionary Fast Transport (EPF) formally the Joint High Speed Vessel, or JHSV. This ship is a shallow draft, high-speed catamaran used for the intra-theater support of personnel, equipment and supplies.

I've talked to Combatant Commanders, as well as the Marine Corps about the EPF, and each has stressed its importance. This vessel truly is a Swiss Army Knife – able to support a wide range of missions for all the services. It can be a troop transport, conduct humanitarian disaster missions, and it could even be used as a hospital ship.

Since delivery of the initial vessel, these ships have supported a wide range of operations around the globe, including assisting in recovery operations after the Indian earthquake and Tsunami in 2004 and the Japanese earthquake and Tsunami in 2011. As we meet, USNS Spearhead is completing her third deployment in the 6th Fleet Area of Responsibility to support operations in EUCOM and AFRICOM.

Clearly, these vessels are effectively filling a critical gap. The USNS Spearhead recently supported a successful anti-piracy operation. Other EPFs are currently deployed to PACOM and CENTCOM providing support and operational tasking for the respective Fleet Commanders.

Of note, the EPFs are being outfitted with different capabilities to support the different needs of each area.

Unfortunately, the President's budget fails to recognize the fact that the EPF meets so many of our Navy's operational needs. The stated requirement for the number of these ships is 18 but to this point 6 have been delivered and another 6 are under contract. The acquisition of one EPF in Fiscal Year '17 will continue to meet service demands and keep the cost per vessel down.

We are benefiting from the efficiencies gained through the construction of the initial six EPF. In order to ensure the capability to build these ships, and maintain such an affordable price, we need to keep the production line open. Unfortunately, without further procurement in Fiscal Year 2017, this line will close.

CLOSING

In closing, I want to emphasize how important it is that we support our nation's Navy as a whole. This is an incredibly challenging time with such a wide range of challenges around the globe. It would be irresponsible to halt investment in our nation's naval capabilities and resources.

Mr. Chairman, I know you understand the vital importance of the Navy's fleet and the need to get our total ship numbers back up to the level required in order to protect the nation and keep the sea lanes free and open.

In order to do that, we must have the strong, reliable, well-trained industrial base to construct and maintain the fleet. Whether it is the over 4,000 men and women who work at the Austal shipyard in Mobile or the thousands of people who work just across the state line in Mississippi at the Huntington Ingalls shipyard, we must maintain our workforce that we have worked so hard to cultivate on the Gulf Coast.

Thank you very much for your time today and thank you for your continued support of our nation's Navy.