

National Defense Authorization Act passes the House

Published December 04. 2014 3:16PM

Updated December 05. 2014 12:16AM

By [Julia Bergman](#)

Publication: theday.com

The House of Representatives on Thursday passed the 2015 National Defense Authorization Act, which includes funding for key defense programs that impact eastern Connecticut. The Senate is expected to take up the bill next week.

U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney, D-2nd District, who is a member of the House Armed Services Committee and is Vice Ranking Member of the Seapower Subcommittee, voted in favor of the bill.

“Despite a challenging fiscal climate, this bill maintains strong investments in our undersea fleet, including continued two-a-year production of Virginia Class submarines, and full funding for the Ohio Replacement Program and the Virginia Payload Module,” Courtney said in a statement. “The unrivaled work of the men and women of Electric Boat has inspired confidence in these programs for the future. This bill underscores our commitment to maintaining the best submarine fleet in the world, and strengthens our economy in eastern Connecticut.”

Courtney advocated for several specific provisions contained in the final bill, including funding for the Ohio Class replacement through a separate account under the Department of Defense —

something Courtney and other lawmakers have talked about for a few years. A separate account would ensure the funding didn't "suffocate" the Navy's regular shipbuilding account and take money away from other programs like surface ships and the Virginia class subs, according to Courtney.

A news release from Courtney's office highlighted several items in the defense bill, which sets policy and spending levels for the U.S. Department of Defense. They include the following:

- The bill authorizes \$5.9 billion for the Virginia-class submarine program, including \$3.6 billion in funding for two Virginia-class submarines in 2015, and \$2.3 billion in funding for the advanced procurement of additional submarines. In April, the Navy awarded the largest single shipbuilding contract in its history to Electric Boat for the construction of 10 Virginia-class nuclear attack submarines. The total 10-ship Block IV contract is for \$18 billion over five years, which will be paid for in increments in each year's defense bill.
- The bill authorizes \$133 million for the Virginia Payload Module program, which, according to the news release from Courtney's office, "would integrate strike payload capacity for Tomahawk Land Attack and follow on missiles in Block V submarines."
- The bill authorizes \$1.3 billion to continue research and development of the Ohio-class ballistic missile submarine

replacement for the Ohio-class replacement program. It also includes a provision to create a National Sea-Based Deterrence Fund to pay for the Ohio-class replacement program outside of the regular shipbuilding account. The agreement also allows for a transfer of up to \$3.5 billion into the fund from unobligated funding.

The act also rejected a request for a new Base Realignment and Closure round in 2017, according to Courtney's news release.

U.S. Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., who served on the conference committee that crafted final compromise language of the bill, said in a phone interview Thursday that he felt confident the Senate could "muster the necessary votes" to pass the bill.

"I will fight strongly for approval of this very significant measure for Connecticut and our national security when it reaches the Senate next week," he said in a statement. "I am particularly pleased that Congress has recognized the contributions made by our Connecticut workforce to our national security by approving the products and weapons systems made in our state."

While critics in the Senate "may have reservations about the money spent," Blumenthal said, "part of our effort is to eliminate any waste and excessive spending in this bill. We're going to monitor and scrutinize closely how funds are actually spent. Defense contractors in Connecticut, at least, have really squeezed and cut to do the best possible job of being on schedule and on budget as the submarines are."

j.bergman@theday.com

Twitter: [JuliaSBergman](https://twitter.com/JuliaSBergman)