

Forbes And Turner HASC Subcommittee Winners

(POLITICO 13 DEC 12) ... Austin Wright

The House Armed Services majority subcommittee shuffle for the new 113th Congress has produced a pair of clear winners: Republican Reps. Randy Forbes of Virginia and Mike Turner of Ohio. Forbes nabbed the coveted chairmanship of the Seapower and Projection Forces Subcommittee, currently led by outgoing Rep. Todd Akin (R-Mo.), who lost his bid for the Senate. Forbes's congressional district is in the eastern part of Virginia, a major shipbuilding hub. And in a statement announcing his new assignment, he vowed to "reverse the decline in the Navy's battle force fleet."

Turner snagged the top spot on the Tactical Air and Land Forces Subcommittee, which opened after its current chairman, Rep. Roscoe Bartlett (R-Md.), lost his reelection race. The committee oversees aircraft acquisition programs, which have a big impact on Ohio's economy because of Wright-Patterson Air Force Base and several Army and Air National Guard Bases located in the state.

"This subcommittee places me in a role to continue my strong advocacy for the men and women at Wright-Patt, the Lima Tank Plant and a number of other facilities which preserve the safety and security of our nation," Turner said in a statement.

As for the losers emerging from Thursday's subcommittee announcements by Armed Services Committee Chairman Buck McKeon (R-Calif.), the story gets a bit more complicated. For one, there's Rep. Rob Wittman (R-Va.), who currently heads the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee. He had been vying for the seapower chairmanship, telling POLITICO last week, "We've certainly indicated our interest in serving there in a leadership position."

Instead, he was tapped to run the Readiness Subcommittee, which is currently led by Forbes and controls the largest share of the Pentagon budget — overseeing training, logistics, civilian personnel and construction projects. "We couldn't be more thrilled," Wittman spokesman Gordon Neal said. "It's a bigger subcommittee account."

Still, a committee staffer, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said defense insiders would view Wittman's move "as a big promotion."

"In the past, [Oversight and Investigations] has been viewed as an entry point for subcommittee chairman," the staffer said, emphasizing that McKeon, who had final say over subcommittee assignments, "views all of the subcommittees as equally important."

A defense lobbyist, also speaking on the condition of anonymity, said Wittman was always considered a "longshot" for the seapower post.

"Wittman would have had to jump several members who are senior to him," the lobbyist said. "Mr. Forbes, he has been a strong member of the team and a champion of a lot of Chairman McKeon's policies and Republican policies as well."

For his part, Rep. Mac Thornberry (R-Texas), the vice chairman of the full committee, will remain head of the Emerging Threats and Capabilities Subcommittee. He had been considered a contender for the air and land subcommittee, but his aides had long stressed that his interests aligned well with emerging threats, which oversees counterterrorism programs.

In addition to his Armed Services post, Thornberry is one of the most senior members of the House Intelligence Committee.

“Thornberry is very passionate about the issues that emerging threats deals with, day in and day out,” the defense lobbyist said.

As for the Military Personnel Subcommittee, Rep. Joe Wilson (R-S.C.) will stay put as chairman. And Rep. Mike Rogers (R-Ala.), who currently doesn’t hold a subcommittee chairmanship on the Armed Services Committee, is taking over as head of Strategic Forces — the spot being vacated by Turner. McKeon has not yet named a chairman for Oversight and Investigations.

“I selected these members to be subcommittee chairmen for their long service on the Armed Services Committee and their dedication to our men and women in uniform,” McKeon said in a statement. “I am honored that these members have agreed to serve in this important work.”