

Funding To Move Carrier To Mayport Cut; ARG Going To Mayport Instead

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The Navy will not move forward with plans to move a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier to Naval Station Mayport in Florida for at least five years, though it will send a three-ship amphibious readiness group to Mayport in 2015 instead.

"The Navy will demonstrate its continued commitment to strategic dispersal by moving a three-ship amphibious ready group in 2015, four years earlier than planned for the carrier," Navy spokeswoman Lt. Courtney Hillson told *Inside the Navy* today.

The Navy decided four years ago to move a carrier to Florida instead of homeporting the entire Atlantic carrier fleet in Norfolk, VA. Lawmakers from the Norfolk area have fought the decision ever since; today, they lauded the funding cut as a victory for Virginia and for taxpayers. The move would have required between half a billion and a billion dollars, they say, to finish dredging a channel at Mayport, improving the harbor there and constructing a nuclear-support facility, among other projects, before the carrier could be homeported in Florida in 2019.

Rep. Randy Forbes (R-VA) said in a statement today that the decision to move the carrier was "made without providing lawmakers any compelling national security rationale," adding that "historic fiscal challenges and the devastating prospect of a trillion dollars in defense cuts have only bolstered our argument that such a move would not just be strategically unnecessary, but also fiscally irresponsible."

"With the need for efficient and effective use of all federal dollars, today's announcement is a victory not only for Hampton Roads, but for all taxpayers concerned about redundancy in government resources during tough economic times," Rep. Rob Wittman (R-VA) said in the same statement. "By canceling plans for a redundant aircraft carrier homeport at Mayport, the Navy has made a responsible choice in their management of taxpayer dollars."

Rep. Scott Rigell (R-VA) added that "it appears the president has finally recognized that spending scarce resources to improve Naval Station Mayport is strategically unwise and unnecessary."

The Navy allocated money for road improvements related to the move in fiscal year 2012, in addition to funds for harbor dredging before that. Rep. Ander Crenshaw (R-FL), who represents the Mayport area, said he was disappointed to see the delay in the carrier relocation, which he said would end up costing the government more in the end.

"We are already three years into making Mayport nuclear-capable," he said in a separate press release. "Further delay will only drive costs higher. The Pentagon is making a short-sighted fiscal decision that is not in the best interest of national security."

He added that 2,000 sailors and their families would be coming to Mayport to support the additional ARG, and \$12 million was allocated in the FY-13 budget for wharf upgrades to

support the big-deck amphibious ship -- or, eventually, a carrier, he said.

"Our community has lived through almost 10 years of carrier promises, and while the new ships announced today are a welcome addition, my fight is for all parts of the Mayport equation, including the ships needed in the basin today and the carrier of tomorrow," he concluded. --

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