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1.) SECNAV Spencer Says Navy Spending Audit Underway / 12 MAR 18
USNI NEWS, Ben Werner

WASHINGTON, D.C. — An audit accounting for where Navy dollars are spent — long a lawmaker talking point — is now underway, said Navy Secretary Richard V. Spencer on Monday.
An audit of how the Navy buys equipment and pays for personnel is in the works and already guiding financial decisions, Spencer said, while speaking Monday at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. The Navy’s Fiscal Year 2019 budget request is for $194.1 billion, and Spencer anticipates questions from lawmakers about how he will spend the money. When asked, he wants to be ready with answers.
“If I’m Congress, I’m asking for a receipt. I’m going to ask where did the money go, and what did it go to,” Spencer said. “The audit will be the primary tool for how we respond.”
A Navy spending audit has long been a request from Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), chair of the Senate Armed Services Committee. An audit first appeared on Spencer’s to-do list before he was even sworn in. During his confirmation hearing, Spencer pledged to bring transparency to the Navy’s budget process.
In November, after becoming Secretary of the Navy, the prospect of a Navy audit was again brought up by McCain while his committee considered approving a pair of Spencer’s assistant secretaries, Thomas Modly, now the Under Secretary of the Navy and James Geurts, now the Navy’s top weapons buyer.
Now underway, Spencer said instead of treating the audit as a task, his leadership team is using the audit was a way to learn about how the Navy and Marine Corps spends money. He didn’t provide details but did say initial results are illuminating.
“We’re uncovering the way we do business and when that happens we start shining lights on logistical distribution, investments in weapons systems,” Spencer said. “You also get some clarity on where your dollars are being spent.”

2.) SECNAV: Navy Is ‘Game On’ In A War For Talent / 12 MAR 18
SEAPower MAGAZINE, Richard R. Burgess
http://seapowermagazine.org/stories/20180309-SecDev.html

WASHINGTON — The secretary of the Navy (SECNAV) said the service is in high competition with other services and the private sector to secure the talented personnel in need to conduct warfare in the modern age.
Speaking March 12, along with the secretaries of the Army and Air Force, to an audience at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington think tank, Navy Secretary Richard V. Spencer said the Navy and Marine Corps are in a “real war for talent” in a tough recruiting and retention environment.
“It’s ‘game on’ right now,” Spencer said. “The Navy; the Army, Air Force and the [Pentagon] are in a talent war and we are going to have to compete with every single tool we have.”
Spencer said that one tool, the new blended retirement system, is a benefit that is “going to draw people into the service. But what are we going to have to deal with DOPMA [the Defense Officer Personnel Management Act]. We’re going to have to find ways to get on- and off-ramps for people. We might actually want it in cyber. We might want you in for three years and then go back into the community and get refreshed and come back in.”
Spencer also noted that such a revision might “open us to competition from the outside. But that’s where game is on. We have to start thinking smarter as managers and providing tools and solutions to retain the best and the brightest.”
Under a “banner of urgency,” Spencer listed people first in his list of priorities on building readiness and lethality, the others being process and capabilities.
In the war for talent, he said, “the [other service secretaries] fish from the same pool, and we’re all going to be looking for more people to do more things in a more intelligent manner. Depending on what article you read, the number of potential applicants that would successfully qualify for our services ranges somewhere from 25 to 30 percent. People are going to have to come in, No. 1, and we’re going to have to figure out a way to adopt and adapt and keep those people that we have.”
Spencer the Navy is trying to “reset the culture,” but the service still has to “do the most with what we have.” The culture shift he is looking for is “if you see a problem, fix the problem. The best person who has the solution to any problem is the person facing off that problem.

“Culture eats strategy for lunch,” he said. “You really do have to get after the culture if, in fact, you’re going to move the needle in an organization, and the way we’ve had the best amount of traction is holding up poster children of success.”

3.) We Are on the Road to Aviation Retention / 15 MAR 18

PROCEEDINGS MAGAZINE, Vice Adm. Robert. P. Burke
https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2018-03/we-are-road-aviation-retention

As the Chief of Naval Personnel, I wanted to respond personally to the recent Proceedings Today article—“The Road to Retention Is Paved with Good Intentions”—by Lieutenant Commander Tony Kochanski. As a career naval officer, I respect and value Proceedings as a forum for enlightened professional discourse among the Sea Services, and I think such frank and open discussion is vital to the Navy’s continued progress. I am delighted that young officers and enlisted professionals feel empowered to discuss complex issues here, and I think such discussion is important and always has the potential to yield positive results. In both this article and his previous article—“To Fix TacAir Pilot Retention, Follow the Money”—Lieutenant Commander Kochanski seems unaware of many efforts by the Bureau of Naval Personnel and Naval Air Forces to improve pilot retention.

I agree we were late to begin acting, but I think we do understand the problem. When aviation retention issues began to show in fiscal year (FY)17 (naval aviation met its FY16 department head numbers), the Chief of Naval Air Forces, Pers-43, N13, and BuPers-3 began a holistic examination of the force. Retention is, unfortunately, a lagging indicator, and what we found was that many contributors were cultural and administrative issues that remained outside the purview of the Bureau of Naval Personnel. Naval Air Forces continues to work these issues day and night. Using fleet feedback, we found that pilots tend to leave the Navy for three reasons: a lack of flight hours and the commensurate lack of warfighting emphasis, difficulties with work-life balance, and, increasingly, money. Money was not the most important reason cited for poor retention, but the percentage of aviators who mentioned it increased compared to previous surveys. We took this seriously and began developing a package of monetary and nonmonetary incentives to address the shortfalls. Both the Bureau of Naval Personnel and Naval Air Forces understood the problem then, continue to understand it now as it develops, and are taking a measured and deliberate approach to address it.

Almost every aspect of officer personnel management is governed by law, and it takes time to make change. In the case of the Aviation Bonus and Aviation Incentive Pay, we did what we could at the beginning of calendar year 2017: we increased bonuses with the funding available, using the existing structure, and we did it fast. We knew we were shooting behind the duck to some degree, but at the same time, Navy-wide, we were not in extremis for aviation department head numbers then. We knew, however, that we would be soon if we stopped at that point. So, we immediately began work on a restructured Aviation Bonus and Aviation Incentive Pay, which are now in the final stages of approval. We are improving all aspects of flight pay, providing as much as $1,000 a month (up from $600 a month), in a more flexible, merit-based system. We also are changing the Aviation Bonus, allowing up to $35,000 per year (the current statutory maximum) for applicable type/model/series–qualified aviators. Finally, we are reorganizing the command bonus to allow more money, earlier after an aviator screens for command. It will address many of the structural dissatisfiers with the past program, but it clearly will not be enough money to “buy our way out of this”—because, as Lieutenant Commander Kochanski points out, that can’t be done. There are other factors at work.

I agree with Lieutenant Commander Kochanski’s statement that problems with pilot retention take more than increased bonuses to solve. Money was not the primary driver for most aviators to leave the Navy. To build higher flight hours in fixed-wing tactical aviation (currently our most limited community), Naval Air Forces instituted the Rhino Readiness Recovery (RRR) initiative—targeting the readiness of F/A-18E/F aircraft hit hard by sequestration-induced budget cuts. Pilots want to spend more time in the cockpit, and increased numbers of
ready aircraft are now beginning to provide more flight time and improve fleet readiness. Strike Fighter Wing Pacific in Lemoore, California, has the highest priority fill for maintainers, and we now track aviation experience more closely, enabling us to ensure they receive the best and most experienced type/model/series maintainers to increase ready aircraft rates. Fleet and type commanders work to reduce administrative burdens and the cycle of inspections that negatively affect pilots’ time to operate. The Optimized Fleet Response Plan (OFRP) provides a more sustainable, lock-step training and certification plan that contributes positively to work-life balance and predictability.

On the manpower end, we’ve worked hard to deliver Sailor 2025 (S2025) to the fleet, which includes multiple avenues to gain additional education (including increased graduate education quotas to civilian schools), allows sailors to take time off from their careers using the Career Intermission Program, and allows increased opportunities to pursue personal interests outside the Navy. S2025 is how we are modernizing naval workforce policies and providing choices, career flexibility, and transparency. In February, I testified to the Senate Armed Services Committee on the Navy’s view of the Defense Officer Personnel Management Act (DOPMA)—the law that governs the “up or out” officer career path model. We have been working to change that. We also are gaining wide support outside the Navy for options in the career path to send our best pilots to in-residence graduate education without penalty to their continued upward mobility.

There are several points in Lieutenant Commander Kochanski’s article that lack sufficient context. My comments on “declining propensity to serve” were related to recruiting efforts, not retention. He also missed the context of my message on the bonus raises being “well received” after the quick fix in 2017, which was essentially that “we have a problem….more is needed.” We remain open and transparent with both the fleet and our civilian leaders and will continue to engage actively, listen to aviators, and meet retention challenges head on. The Air Boss and I talk frequently on this issue—there is no daylight between us—and we will continue to work hard to improve career opportunities and compensation for the naval aviation community.

Our people are the Navy’s greatest resource, and I am committed to creating a climate of operational excellence. It is our shared responsibility to get the word out about policy changes, and to seek the most current and relevant information that affects our ability to do our jobs. Personnel policies matter to all sailors and their families. I encourage every Navy leader to read the NavAdmin messages, and go to navy.mil, the CNP website, the CNP Facebook page, or the MyNavy portal to find a detailed paper titled “Growing to Win: Sailor 2025.” It talks about all these efforts in detail. Read, learn, and talk about where we are headed with your sailors. We will see many needed improvements to the Navy’s personnel system in 2018, and we need the support and involvement of all our leaders to ensure we remain on track.

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The Navy identified two aviators who were killed following a crash off Naval Air Station Key West, Fla. on Wednesday.
“Johnson, a Naval Aviator and 2007 graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy, was piloting the jet when the incident occurred while King, a 2012 U.S. Naval Academy graduate, was serving as the Weapons Systems Operator,” read a statement from Naval Air Forces Atlantic.
Johnson and King were attached to Strike Fighter Attack Squadron (VFA) 213 “Black Lions” based at Naval Air Station Oceana, Va.
“The entire Blacklion Family is grieving the loss of two great Americans,” VFA-213’s Commanding Officer, Cmdr. Kevin Robb said in a statement.
“Lt. Cmdr. Johnson and Lt. King were phenomenal young men, exceptional naval aviators, and were living models of what honor, courage, and commitment really mean.”
The squadron was training at NAS Key West along with elements of Carrier Air Wing 8 at the time of the incident.

“Today, the squadron took the day off from training in order to grieve. The remaining squadrons in Carrier Air Wing 8 were briefed on the mishap and then resumed normal training operations,” read a Thursday statement ARLANT.

The crash is currently under investigation. According to eyewitness accounts of the crash, while the Super Hornet was on approach a flash of fire surrounded the fighter.

“There was a fireball and it literally dropped out of the sky,” witness Barbie Wilson told The Virginian-Pilot.

The service has yet to recover the wreckage pending additional investigation.

“The F/A-18F remains in the water where it crashed and will stay there until a Mishap Investigation Board (MIB) conducts its investigation,” ARLANT said in a statement.

“The MIB thoroughly examines previous aircraft maintenance, number of hours flown on the aircraft, physical condition of the aircrew and their activities previous to the accident.”

The Navy has also brought in a team to prevent environmental damage from the accident or the wreckage “The goal is to restore the impact to the pre-existing condition and to coordinate the overall Navy response. This includes close coordination with other Navy entities, state, local and federal stakeholders and possibly outside agency contractors,” read the statement from ARLANT.

VFA-231 is slated to return to Naval Air Station Oceana by the end of the month.

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