

Navy funds one LCS in Marinette



Nathan Phelps, Gannett Wisconsin Media 5:04 p.m. CDT April 1, 2015



(Photo: U.S. Navy)

MARINETTE – The prime contractor for a new class of warships being built in Marinette was awarded money to build one of the ships as part of the 2015 budget.

The Navy announced Wednesday it awarded \$362 million to Lockheed Martin on Tuesday, along with \$79 million in "advanced procurement funding" for another ship. Lockheed Martin is building its ships at Marinette Marine Corp.

A different design of the ship is being built by Austal USA in Mobile, Ala. Under the allocation, that company was awarded \$691 million to build two ships.

Six of the Lockheed Martin ships are under construction in Marinette. Two, the USS Freedom and USS Fort Worth, are operational in the Navy's fleet.

Work at Marinette is wrapping up on the future USS Milwaukee, and construction is expected to get underway on two more ships this year.

"This funding demonstrates the Navy's continued commitment to increase near-term ship procurement at significant cost savings, sustain stable production of both designs, and maintain industrial base stability," the Navy said in an emailed statement.

The littoral combat ship is designed to operate in shallower waters, performing a number of missions including anti-submarine operations and mine detection. The average cost for the first 10 ships built by Lockheed Martin is \$360 million per ship.

The Navy has said it could buy more than 50 of the ships.

The Department of Defense has plans to beef up the basic design of the LCS in later versions of the ship, offering, among other things, increased firepower and survivability. The Navy also plans to call at least some of the ships "frigates" rather than littoral combat ships.

Lockheed Martin said the balance of funding for the second ship is expected by the end of the year. The \$79 million in advance funds are designed to keep production and costs on schedule, according to a statement issued by the company late Wednesday afternoon.

"We thank the Navy for maintaining the cost and schedule for the block buy," said Joe North, vice president of Littoral Ship Systems at Lockheed Martin Mission Systems and Training. "Thousands of people across the country contribute to this important program and will continue to do so as we transition to the new frigate upgrade in the coming years."

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