

Defense News

By: Joe Gould and Leo Shane III | May 17, 2019

3 takeaways from Thornberry's 2020 DoD reform agenda

WASHINGTON — After [years](#) of [pushing](#) new [reforms](#) for the Pentagon, the top Republican on the House Armed Services Committee wants to ensure defense officials are following them.

“None of this is revolutionary. I don’t want to be revolutionary right now,” Rep. Mac Thornberry, R-Texas, told reporters Thursday. “We’ve made some substantial progress. We need to build and implement what we have done.”

After shepherding more than 60 acquisition reform provisions into law in recent years, Thornberry on Thursday unveiled two bills: one aimed at [enforcing](#) previously enacted Pentagon reforms and another to [foster innovation](#), especially among smaller businesses.

Thornberry said he shared the legislation with HASC Chairman [Adam Smith](#), D-Wash., in hopes of including it in the annual defense policy bill, the National Defense Authorization Act. It’s been Thornberry’s practice each year to publish a discussion draft of his reform legislation in advance of the HASC markup — in this case, next month.

Here are some of the key focus areas.

Enforcing reforms. The Pentagon hasn’t evolved to Thornberry’s satisfaction on business systems, modular open architectures for major defense platforms, rapid prototyping, or assembling policy and personnel for managing intellectual property rights.

The bill would fence off various pots of Pentagon funding until the progress he’s after is made.

“We told you to do it, we’re fencing money until you actually do it,” Thornberry said.

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For example, last year’s defense authorization law required the Pentagon [save 25 percent](#) in so-called [fourth estate](#), or administrative, functions. But the Defense Department’s plan, Thornberry said, is too vague and “does not provide the road map to achieving the savings the law requires.”



[Reject defense reforms, federal workers urge Congress](#)

Federal workers are urging lawmakers to reject defense acquisition reform proposals.

By: Joe Gould

Big focus on small business. Because a legal limit on some venture capital-owned firms getting [Small Business Innovation Research](#) program grants is stymieing the Defense Department’s access to new technologies, Thornberry is proposing a broader waiver to the limit. (He noted that the expansion isn’t about the money for these businesses but rather access to the Department of Defense that comes with the SBIR program.)

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Current law means “if you don’t have this, you’re left to compete against the majors,” Thornberry said. He aims to turn that around to make it easier for successful small businesses to bring innovative ideas to the Pentagon.

The bill also seeks to ensure small business grants are driven toward the Pentagon’s strategic priorities.

“You all have heard as I have, what’s called the valley of death. So you have these small businesses, they get a grant to build something and then the services never take it up — it just dies,” Thornberry said.

“The whole goal is: Can you develop a good idea and keep it alive long enough for it to be taken up? You’ll still have to have the Army, Navy, Air Force or Marines take up your idea, get it into a budget or rapid prototyping.”

Embracing recommendations. The bill would raise the [General Services Administration e-commerce portal’s](#) micro-purchase threshold — or the amount that can be spent without a competitive procurement — to \$25,000, at the agency’s request. It’s one of several recommendations from congressionally mandated panels and agencies Thornberry wants to advance.

Since Congress [divided](#) the former Acquisition, Technology and Logistics office into the offices of the Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment and the Undersecretary of Defense for Research and Engineering in a broad sense, the Pentagon has responded with ideas about how to enshrine the specifics.

The bill would redesign the certification and education requirements of the acquisition workforce as recommended by the reform-focused [Section 809 Panel](#).