

Press-Telegram

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LOCAL NEWS

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Good news for the shipyard

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Bill could give shipyard more work

Foreign navies may use facility

By James R. Carroll
From Our National Bureau

WASHINGTON — The Long Beach Naval Shipyard could be getting more work repairing or overhauling aging U.S. warships heading for foreign seas.

The House Foreign Affairs Committee on Wednesday directed the Navy to lease or sell 17 ships to U.S. allies — and suggested that the foreign navies take their ships to American shipyards for repairs or overhauls before claiming them.

The committee bill now goes to the full House for expected passage. The Senate is expected to approve the House bill.

Instead of being mothballed or scrapped, the warships would be leased or sold to other navies, a move that is expected to generate hundreds of millions of dollars in annual revenues to the U.S. government.

Congress previously approved leasing 25 Navy ships to U.S. allies, and three of them — Knox-class frigates going to Tai-

wan — are to be overhauled in Long Beach.

It is not clear what the additional work would mean for the 3,550 employees at the shipyard, which is facing the threat of closure in the next round of base closings next year.

Shipyard spokesman John Ryan has said the impact on employment depends on the schedules and volume of work Brazil or other nations would require.

The Long Beach shipyard's friends in Congress are wooing nations from the first round of leases who still haven't taken

their ships to follow Taiwan's lead and bring work to Long Beach.

Shipyard backers are lobbying for still more work from the new package of 17 ships, about half of which are based on the West Coast.

A prime target at the moment is Brazil, which is looking at leasing six Knox-class frigates from the first package of ships and could get two more frigates and a tank landing ship in the package approved by the foreign affairs panel Wednesday.

Two of the frigates and the tank landing ship are on the

West Coast, and Long Beach area House members are trying to convince Brazilian officials that the vessels should be refurbished in Long Beach.

Rep. Dana Rohrabacher, R-Huntington Beach, met Wednesday with Brazilian Ambassador Paulo Tarso Flecha de Lima to make the case for Long Beach.

Complicating the picture is the fact that Brazil has not decided whether it wants all the frigates and the tank landing ship.

Congressional and Brazilian sources said the South American nation also is talking with Great Britain about leasing warships.