

# Action in Congress

By Megan Scully

If Texas Republican Mac Thornberry takes the gavel of the powerful House Armed Services Committee in the next Congress, as is widely expected, cyber security could quickly become a top priority item for the panel and a major focus of its annual policy bill.

A thoughtful lawmaker and an old-school hawk, Thornberry is considered an expert on the complex cyber world, having been tapped by GOP leaders in 2011 to lead a cyber task force aimed at focusing Congress' efforts on combating the growing national security and economic threat.

From his perch on the Armed Services' intelligence, emerging threats, and capabilities subcommittee, he has had direct oversight of cyber issues affecting the military and routinely inserted provisions in recent defense authorization bills demanding reports and creating at least one new cyber leadership post.

"This subcommittee has viewed as one of its primary responsibilities helping ensure that the military is as prepared as it can be to defend the nation in cyberspace," Thornberry said at a March hearing on the Administration's Fiscal 2015 budget request. "It is one of the few areas of the budget where there is widespread agreement that we need to spend more."

Thornberry has cautioned, however, that it doesn't necessarily mean the Defense Department should get a blank check for its cyber efforts, particularly in this era of constrained defense spending. He wants money directed at priority programs and wants to ensure Congress remains in the loop on the issue.

"We also want to see that all taxpayer funds are spent carefully and effectively," he said at the same hearing. "And we want to develop policies and, frankly, the public education required to protect the nation in this new domain of warfare."

The House-passed version of the defense authorization bill, which still must be reconciled with the Senate Armed Services Committee's bill in the waning days of the 113th Congress, includes a provision authored by Thornberry that would require the Defense Department

to create an executive agent for cyber testing and training ranges. The goal, according to the panel, is to prevent redundancies while also addressing gaps in cyber training.

"Though there has been significant growth of cyber personnel to fulfill critical defensive and offensive missions for the department, the capacity for training in a realistic environment has not kept pace," according to Thornberry's language. "The committee is



*Thornberry going slow and steady this time.*

concerned that those challenges have not been addressed and that the department is unable to come to resolution on how best to provide adequate management and support for such capabilities."

In an effort to boost oversight, the House bill tasks the Government Accountability Office, Congress's investigative arm, with reviewing the existing organizational structure of US Cyber Command to determine how clearly the Defense Department has defined the command's missions, responsibilities, and authorities.

The bill also asks GAO to review how Cyber Command, established in 2010, supports and coordinates worldwide missions while also minimizing duplication of efforts with combatant commands and the individual military services.

Virginia Republican Rep. J. Randy Forbes is expected to challenge the 10-term lawmaker for the coveted post of HASC chairman.

Forbes, who hails from southern Virginia and chairs the Armed Services

seapower and projection forces subcommittee, has made shipbuilding and Navy issues his top priority.

But Thornberry, who has previously lost bids for the Armed Services and Intelligence Committee chairman spots, is considered the odds-on favorite for the job.

Retiring House Armed Services Chairman Howard "Buck" McKeon endorsed the Texas Republican for the job months ago and has appeared to be grooming his top lieutenant to take the gavel.

Thornberry also meets two other requisites for the chairman job. He has close ties to House GOP leaders and has a well-established leadership political action committee that has raised nearly \$180,000 this cycle, according to numbers provided by the Center for Responsive Politics.

By comparison, Forbes' leadership PAC has raised just \$29,000.

Aside from cyber, Thornberry has also been an advocate for improving and streamlining the Pentagon's archaic acquisition processes. Previous attempts at acquisition reform in recent years have largely fallen flat, doing little to make positive and lasting changes to how the department does business.

The House-passed authorization bill includes what Thornberry's office describes as "modest steps toward acquisition reform."

Those include a provision directing the Pentagon's director of operational test and evaluation take the potential for increases in program costs or schedule delays into consideration when implementing the office's policies and procedures.

The bill also encourages the Defense Secretary to improve the department's efforts to collect data on service contracts and conduct better analysis to identify any waste.

Thornberry has said he plans to make changes over time, rather than study the issue at length and unveil a major legislative package—traditionally the approach in the past. ★

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