

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-24-107732](#), a report to congressional committees

## Why GAO Did This Study

The Navy plans to invest almost \$130 billion to acquire 12 *Columbia* class nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines, the sea-based leg of the nation's air, land, and sea nuclear deterrent. Congress included a provision in statute for the Navy to provide updates on the *Columbia* class program's design and construction goals and for GAO to assess this information.

This report assesses (1) the extent to which submarines are on track to meet cost and schedule targets and how risks could affect construction progress; and (2) the extent to which actions in the *Columbia* class supplier base are helping to achieve construction goals and mitigate risks.

GAO reviewed Navy and shipbuilder documents to identify construction status and costs; assessed the program's performance data against selected best practices to understand progress and challenges; and interviewed Navy, shipbuilder, and supplier officials. This is a public version of a sensitive report that issued in July 2024. Information deemed sensitive has been omitted.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making five recommendations, including that the Navy require the shipbuilder to revise its estimated cost at completion and include thorough analysis in its reporting; and that the program identify information it needs to determine whether investments in the supplier base support *Columbia* class construction goals. The Department of Defense concurred with the recommendations and cited actions that it will take to address them.

View [GAO-24-107732](#). For more information, contact Shelby S. Oakley at (202) 512-4841 or [oakleys@gao.gov](mailto:oakleys@gao.gov).

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## COLUMBIA CLASS SUBMARINE

### Overcoming Persistent Challenges Requires Yet Undemonstrated Performance and Better-Informed Supplier Investments

#### What GAO Found

Based on current construction performance, the Navy reported in April 2024 that the first (lead) *Columbia* class submarine is estimated to be delivered 12 to 16 months after its originally planned date. This would result in delivery between October 2028 and February 2029. A late delivery could ultimately jeopardize the lead submarine's planned availability for operations in 2030.

According to GAO's analysis of program data from January 2022 through May 2023, cost and schedule performance for lead submarine construction has consistently fallen short of targets. Through early 2024, those trends had not improved, and future risks will likely add to current cost and schedule growth. The program has reported that the shipbuilder needs to take swift and significant actions to address the causes of poor construction performance. However, as GAO has previously reported, the program has tried to mitigate some of these causes—such as late materials and detailed design products—for years.

#### Lead *Columbia* Class Submarine Stern during Transport between Shipyards



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Based on data through May 2023, GAO estimated that lead submarine construction costs at completion could be hundreds of millions of dollars more than the Navy's planned costs. Although the shipbuilder is also expecting cost increases, its estimated overrun is smaller and assumes significant future improvement that GAO's past work suggests is unrealistic. Further, program reporting on submarine construction progress did not always include a thorough analysis of why the program missed cost and schedule goals. Without realistic cost estimates and adequate analysis, the program will struggle to address continuing and future risks that could further degrade construction performance.

The Navy has not consistently defined information needed to determine whether investments made in the supplier base have increased supplier production or generated cost savings and how those results support the program's goals. Since 2018, the Navy reported receiving more than \$2.6 billion to invest in the submarine supplier base and help achieve *Columbia* class construction goals. Without identifying consistent information, the Navy is not well positioned to ensure that these investments will effectively spur their intended benefits for the program.