

Congressman Bacon Wants a 'Healthier' EW Budget

Rep. Don Bacon (NE-2), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Cyber, IT and Innovation, House Armed Services Committee, provided an insightful perspective in his keynote on Wednesday morning at AOC 2025. The Main Stage hall was packed with attendees, as the former EW officer gave his assessment about the health of EMSO today.

His keynote began with a basic question: "So, what is our mission?" he asked. "I think our mission is very clear. We want to ensure that we dominate the electronic magnetic spectrum for our country and our allies – that we dominate it. We can use our radars; we can use our nav aids and our communications; and we want to prevent our adversaries from using that same spectrum. I know this is, this is like '101' for all of us here, but not everybody gets it. Not everybody gets that in Congress. I'm not so sure our Pentagon gets it."

In terms of assessing progress over the past several years, he asked, "How are we doing? Well, I'm going to tell you today that I think we've done a good job getting leadership in the right spots. I think we have the right organizations in place. I think we have new doctrine and strategy. But in the end, it's about the budget. And my feedback to all of you today is that I don't think we're doing as well as we should. I hear a lot of talk, I see a lot of papers, but if you actually look at the budget, we're not that healthy in the EMSO space."

As an example, he pointed to the US Air Force's EA-37B Compass Call program, which replaces the retiring EC-130H Compass Call fleet. He said that USINDOPACOM has identified a need for 21 EA-37B aircraft for its area of responsibility. The Air Force initially requested six aircraft in its budget requests, up through FY2021. Congressman Bacon and the EW Working Group

pressed for more, and Congress was able to fund four additional EA-37B aircraft through FY25. He said Congress provided \$400 million earlier this year for another two aircraft, but that the Secretary of Defense's office re-purposed that money toward other priorities. The fleet size, he said, remains at 10 aircraft, less than half of the USINDOPACOM requirement.

Congressman Bacon then talked about his experience in EW. By the end of the Cold War in 1990, he said the US clearly had a dominant EW capability. But it began to atrophy in the 1990s and that trend continued through the 2010s. When he was elected to Congress in 2016, he joined the EW Working Group and, with the support of the House Armed Services Committee, the EWWG was able to direct several EW leadership reforms in the Pentagon. "We were able to mandate a new doctrine, a new strategy," he said. "We were able to do cross functional teams. We've put all this in legislation, and we're seeing the results. I'm proud that we have a great electronic warfare organization at STRATCOM that's leading our joint efforts. I think this is a direct result of the work that we did in our committee."

"So, I've seen a lot of progress. But in the end," he explained, "if you don't see it in the budgets, and you don't see it in the capabilities, it's for naught. And so here, our challenge today is...to push the Pentagon to make this [EW] a priority in spending, because in the end it's not about papers, it's not about PowerPoint briefings, it's not about an organization. You've got to have capability that can deliver effects on China and Russia and other and other foes. That's the bottom line. I hear a lot of talk; I don't see a lot of performance. I don't see a lot of results when it comes to the budget."