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Navy League, others advocate for military team

A longtime military advocate in Camden County is now chairing a campaign to raise awareness about the dangers of underfunding, and overtaking, the nation's Navy-Marine Corps team.

Sheila McNeill, president of The Camden Partnership and past national president of the Navy League of the United States, will lead the movement, called "America's Strength — Investing in the Navy-Marine Corps Team."

"Since 2001, the pace of Navy and Marine Corps operations has not slowed down," McNeill said. "Yet because the work of the Navy-Marine Corps team is out of sight, over the horizon on the vast oceans of the world, many are unaware of their work or the strain that they are under. The 'America's Strength' campaign will work to ensure that Congress and the American people understand the dire consequences of a Navy-Marine Corps team unable to fulfill its mission."

The Navy League of the United States has brought together humanitarian organizations, businesses, retired military officers and citizens for the grassroots and advertising campaign that urges Congress to act to avoid long-

term detrimental impact on the nation's defense, economy and leadership in the world.

In a letter to Congress, the Navy League's campaign warned that if Congress does not take action the nation risks a Navy-Marine Corps team "unable to continue their critical work of protecting commerce at sea, responding to humanitarian crises and promoting regional stability."

The letter is part of the March 26 launch of the campaign to urge Congress to significantly increase the Department of the Navy's fiscal year 2017 budget to meet the Navy-Marine Corps team's needs. The Department of the Navy is in need of a critical investment for the construction and maintenance of new aircraft, ships and equipment and to maintain the readiness of sailors and Marines.

The combination of years of responding to crisis after crisis, with a smaller budget and delayed maintenance and modernization, is crippling the Navy-Marine Corps team, according to the Navy League. At the same time, threats in the maritime environment are growing. China threatens its neighbors in the East and South China seas; Iran continues to pursue a nu-



McNeill

clear weapons program and anti-access capabilities in the Strait of Hormuz; and piracy, trafficking, and terrorism continue on the high seas.

Today, ships regularly conduct eight to 10 month deployments. Aircraft that were designed to fly 6,000 hours are now expected to fly 10,000 hours. And when not deployed, sailors do not have the opportunity to train and maintain their ships and squadrons due to a lack of funding and time.

The Navy and Marine Corps need to "reset" the fleet after more than a decade of war operations and restore weapons inventories depleted in recent conflicts. These

shortfalls all point to the need for more Department of the Navy funding.

"The U.S. Navy and Marine Corps are deployed forward in large part to deter conflict and protect our allies," said Cmdr. Bryan Clark, USN (Ret.), senior fellow, Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA). "They are on the front line off the coast of Ukraine, in the Persian Gulf, and throughout the South China Sea. The Navy is underfunded to meet these and future needs by more than \$10 billion each year by the Navy's own reckoning. As threats to our allies and partners increase in the future, this shortfall will likely grow higher. The nation will need to decide if we are going to maintain our alliances and prevent conflict away our shores, or if we want a strategy that reduces America's role in the world and we wait until trouble comes to our hemisphere."

Clint Eisenhauer, vice president of government relations for Maersk Inc., the world's largest container shipping company, said, "The Navy-Marine Corps team protects free trade, commerce and navigation on the seas. Without their presence, the

free flow of goods and energy around the globe will be at serious risk. If we do not take action to support the Department of the Navy, we risk damage to the domestic and international economies that rely on the safety and security that U.S. Navy sea and air power provide."

U.S. businesses and consumers rely on goods shipped by sea from around the world, and more than 80 percent of the world's trade is conducted by sea, with 90 percent of the general cargo carried in containers. Seventy-five percent of the world's maritime trade and half of the oil trade pass through a handful of international straits and canals.

Vulnerable undersea cables account for 95 percent of the world's international voice and data traffic. As recently as February, pirates killed an officer and kidnapped three crew members during an armed attack on a Greek oil tanker off the coast of Nigeria. Without the presence of the U.S. Navy, rogue nations and terrorism could close shipping lanes, increasing the cost of consumer goods.

"When a humanitarian disaster strikes, the Navy-Marine Corps team is, on many occasions, the world's

first-responder to alleviate the profound human suffering that such events can create," said Matthew Peterson, Deputy to the President and Chief Executive Officer of Project HOPE. "Time and time again, the U.S. Navy has been in position to quickly provide water, food, medical aid and supplies to victims following disasters. But at its current pace of operations and with a backlog of maintenance and modernization, we are very concerned that when the next disaster strikes, ships, crews, aircraft and equipment will not be available to reach the victims in time."

Humanitarian assistance and disaster response is a historic and ongoing activity for the U.S. Navy-Marine Corps team. The Department of the Navy partners with a number of governments and non-governmental organizations to rush aid to stricken regions around the world when disasters occur, including following Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines and the tragic earthquake and tsunami in Japan.

Visit <http://navyleague.org/files/americas-strength/open-letter-to-congress.pdf> to read a copy of the letter.