

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 14, 2020

The Honorable Kenneth J. Braithwaite
United States Navy
1000 Navy Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20350-1200

Dear Secretary Braithwaite,

In recent months, the San Diego area Navy and Marine Corps community has faced a series of difficult challenges. Now, as we mourn the tragic loss of eight Marines and one Sailor in the recent training accident near San Clemente Island, we write to express our concern for the community and to respectfully request information about what the Department is doing to support service members and their families and to address any issues related to recent challenges.

First, we support the Commandant's decision to suspend all amphibious assault vehicle (AAV) waterborne training until we learn what caused the accident off San Clemente Island. Given the age of the fleet and that this is the third accident since 2011 involving an AAV resulting in the death or injury of Marines, we request a full investigation into the AAVs currently in use, including an examination of the seaworthiness of the vehicles and the quality and sufficiency of training provided to Marines and Sailors who serve on and are transported in them.

We are especially concerned because this tragedy comes as the San Diego naval community continues to recover from the massive fire aboard the USS Bonhomme Richard last month. Navy, federal, and local firefighters fought valiantly to put out the fire and many of them suffered injuries in doing so. The considerable damage to the ship could also hinder our operational efforts as we deal with rising naval threats in the Indo-Pacific region. The cleanup aboard the ship is costly, as will its restoration or replacement, at a time of economic crisis within our country.

Furthermore, earlier this year, Captain Brett Crozier was relieved of command of the USS Theodore Roosevelt—also home-ported in San Diego—after doing what we believe to be the right thing in writing a letter to his superiors saying he needed to move his Sailors off the aircraft carrier to deal with the coronavirus outbreak aboard his ship. The investigation into Captain Crozier revealed dysfunction within the Navy's chain of command, affecting the health, safety, and morale of sailors.

We are concerned that this series of incidents is indicative of broader issues within the Navy and Marine Corps that impact morale within the force and which deserve closer scrutiny within the military and Congress. Therefore, we ask that you quickly and thoroughly advise Congress of the actions the Navy and Marine Corps will take to address these recent challenges, including any managerial, systemic, or cultural issues that need to be remedied either locally or more broadly within the Navy and Marine Corps. We stand ready to assist you in these efforts to support service members and their families.

Sincerely,



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Kamala D. Harris
United States Senator

Cc: Admiral Michael M. Gilday, Chief of Naval Operations
Cc: General David H. Berger, Commandant of the Marine Corps