

## Navy League Needs 'Grass Roots' to Flourish in Years Ahead

These are revolutionary times for the sea services and the Maritime Administration. They are changing their goals, structures and processes to deal with new challenges of the 21st century. And the Navy League this month will make some revolutionary changes of its own to provide them with the strongest possible support.

To deal with new threats to our nation, the Navy is implementing a Fleet Response Plan to surge six carrier strike groups to world hot spots in 30 days and two more carrier groups in 90 days.

The Navy and Marine Corps are making fundamental changes to the way they manage their forces, plan their operations and project power ashore. Their Sea Basing concept will place enormous flexibility in the hands of our military.

More than 36,000 Marines are fighting for freedom today in Iraq, Afghanistan, Djibouti and elsewhere around the world; the highest number deployed since Operation Desert Storm. Meanwhile, the Marine Corps is creating provisional units to provide our forces in Iraq with specialized personnel such as intelligence officers, civil affairs experts and military police.

The Coast Guard has taken on responsibility for heightened security of our nation's ports and waterways, while conducting the largest procurement program in its history. And the Maritime Administration is improving its response time and raising its mission-capable rate while managing a 16 percent reduction in our Ready Reserve Force of cargo ships, a primary means of deployment for our military forces.

These goals, and others, will not be easy to accomplish. All of the Navy League's constituent organizations — the Coast Guard, Marine Corps, Navy and Maritime Administration — are dealing with onerous funding constraints and competing national priorities such as the rising costs of health care and a rapidly aging work force. All are challenged by the continuing decline in the military service experience of our congressional representatives. The pervasive encroachment on existing military lands and installations by external parties continues to hamper the sea services' training and weapon development.

These are among the reasons why the Navy League is launching a revolution of its own. The challenges ahead demand a Navy League able to address a broader range of issues, more quickly and with greater impact than ever before. In concert with senior officers and staff of our organization, I am pleased to announce the creation of the Navy League's "Grass Roots" Legislative Transformation Initiative.

Throughout our history, the breadth and intensity of our legislative affairs activities has been impressive. We have done well at educating Congress about the needs, requirements and accomplishments of the sea services and U.S.-flag Merchant Marine. However, the times

demand that we do better. Accordingly, a central tenet of our "Grass Roots" initiative is to increase the involvement of our regions, areas and councils in our legislative affairs activities.

Navy League members around the world are the bedrock of our organization. They are skilled, selfless and committed. The essence of our "Grass Roots" initiative is to focus their ideas and energy on our legislative priorities.

A chief means toward that end is the appointment of a Regional Vice President for Legislative Affairs in each of our 16 U.S. regions. Reporting to the Region President with a "dotted line" relationship to the National Vice President for Legislative Affairs, the individuals to fill these new posts will play a primary part in our future success. They will bring local Navy League people together with selected members of Congress to carry out our support mission.

The Regional Vice Presidents will serve as the experts in their regions for grass roots visits and communications, conduct an annual training session on legislative affairs based on national guidelines, and work with area and council officers in their region to ensure they are receiving appropriate information and support on legislative affairs. They also will recommend annual legislative affairs awards from their region using national criteria.

As always, our National Vice President for Legislative Affairs will provide strategic guidance on our messages to Congress, working with the National President and Executive Director, as well as the Regional Vice Presidents and other key personnel.

Additional details of our "Grass Roots" project will be available at our Winter Meeting in early November, and later in *Sea Power* and on the Navy League website. Working together, we will increase exponentially the clout of the Navy League and the impact of our legislative affairs activities.

President Theodore Roosevelt, who nurtured the Navy League to life 102 years ago, said in the midst of World War I: "We are fighting in the quarrel of civilization against barbarism, of liberty against tyranny." Those words are equally meaningful today, and our dedication to our task is greater than ever. ■



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