

## **Guest Column: Congress must provide more resources to our Navy-Marine Corps team**

By [Bob Buehn](#)

As the city celebrates the re-opening of the main runway at NAS Jacksonville after an historic year-long project, it is a good time to reflect on what the Navy and Marine Corps mean to our community.

Jacksonville has the third largest military presence in the United States. This presence, according to a 2015 economic impact study, brings in \$3.5 billion in direct defense spending, over 100,000 jobs and \$11.9 billion in total gross revenue.

The Navy-Marine Corps team can also take credit for our port, responsible for \$27 billion in economic output for the region.

Our global economic system depends on the assurance that major cargo ships can sail around the world uninterrupted.

As cargo ships get bigger with a capacity for more and more goods, it is imperative that these ships are able to move safely and freely. The Navy and Marine Corps team ensures free flow of commerce, the underpinning of economic prosperity for Jacksonville, the U.S., and the world.

But the U.S. Navy is overextended and underfunded. Our political leaders have placed arbitrary budget restrictions on our military even though the Navy is operating at an increased pace.

Even as military leaders testify that the world is “more dangerous than it’s ever been,” our military is being asked to do more with less and has been since sequestration-level cuts were implemented more than three years ago.

The strain is showing.

The Marine Corps has been raiding aircraft “boneyards” for available components, and a recent viral Fox News story showed Marines stripping a museum exhibit for spare parts.

An analyst with the Institute for the Study of War told The Marine Corps Times that Marine Corps aviation is “on the verge of systemic failure” because the fleet has been overused since 9/11.

The Navy has testified before Congress that its shortfall of 104 strike fighters could grow to 134 aircraft by 2020 if funds do not increase.

Budget restrictions created backlogs in maintenance and repairs, causing available planes to be flown harder and longer, increasing wear and tear and increasing the amount of maintenance work that must be performed on those planes, creating a vicious cycle.

Navy ships are facing the same problem. Budget cuts delay maintenance work and deployments are extended, which only puts more strain on ship's systems and creates even more maintenance work when they return to home port.

We are asking our people in uniform to put their lives on the line with old equipment and planes just out of the storage yard to sacrifice for a country that seems unwilling to invest in them.

The Navy-Marine Corps will not complain — sacrifice is built into their ethos. But as part of the Navy family, it is up to us to be their advocate.

We in Jacksonville know better than anyone how important the sea services are to our economy, both locally and nationally. It is both in our interest and the right thing to do.

We must tell Congress that those in the sea services deserve better. In this election season, we should hear from candidates on where they stand with regard to national security and these critical issues.

We need a strong Navy and Marine Corps for the country's economic future; our forces cannot patrol and protect the global commons with substandard and worn out equipment. We owe them better.

Bob Buehn of Fleming Island is national director of the Navy League of the U.S.