

Campaign announced to increase Navy funding

By **GORDON JACKSON** The Brunswick News | Posted: Tuesday, March 31, 2015 12:00 am

The national Navy League has announced a campaign to generate public support to significantly increase the Department of Navy's budget.

The organization has created the "America's Strength — Investing in the Navy-Marine Corps Team" campaign.

Navy League officials said the grassroots campaign is comprised of humanitarian organizations, businesses, retired military leaders and citizens. The goal is to raise awareness that over-extension and underfunding are having a detrimental effect on the Navy and Marine Corps.

Brunswick native and former national Navy League President Sheila McNeill is the chair of the national campaign.

"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."

McNeill, president of Camden Partnership, was in Washington D.C., last week for the announcement. She said the campaign will include ads, opinion editorials and letters to the editors in newspapers across the nation.

"We are saying get with our military and fund them so they can do their jobs," she said. "It is important it come out in our communities. We will have ads all over the country."

The campaign will create public awareness of the impact on the Navy responding to events across the world with a smaller budget and delayed maintenance and modernization of its fleet.

"U.S. Navy forward presence can be visible or invisible, large or small, provocative or peaceful, depending upon what best serves U.S. interests," McNeill said. "The sight of a single U.S. warship in the harbor of a friend can serve as tangible evidence of (America's) close relations with or commitment to that country. That guaranteed power should be considered priceless."

The campaign will also address potential threats from China to its neighbors in the East and South China seas, efforts by Iran to develop nuclear weapons and piracy — trafficking and terrorism on the high seas.

The Navy's ships regularly conduct deployments lasting up to 10 months, the lifespan of aircraft has been extended and sailors don't get the training necessary because of funding issues.

"The U.S. Navy and Marine Corps are deployed forward in large part to deter conflict and protect our allies," said retired Navy Cmdr. Bryan Clark, senior fellow, Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments. "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 from 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.”

The campaign also has the support of the shipping industry.

“The Navy-Marine Corps team protects free trade, commerce and navigation on the seas,” said Clint Eisenhauer, vice president of government relations for Maersk Inc., the world’s largest shipping company. “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.”