

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

November 18, 2014

The Honorable Jeh Johnson  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Johnson:

We believe that the United States Coast Guard's decision to close air facilities in Newport, Oregon and Charleston, South Carolina would needlessly endanger mariners in our respective states and we urge you to prevent the Coast Guard from doing so. We appreciate Commandant Paul Zukunft's willingness to delay the implementation of this decision by two weeks, which allows the discussion about its appropriateness to continue.

The Coast Guard's decision to close these facilities would threaten the safety of mariners in Oregon and South Carolina. Thousands of Oregonians and South Carolinians work at and around these ports, often risking their health and safety in unpredictable waters. Newport is one of Oregon's three deep-draft ports and is home to the state's largest commercial fishing fleet as well as National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and Oregon State University vessels. Charleston not only serves as one of America's top ports in terms of cargo value and volume, but also boasts a lucrative marine tourism industry, as well as large shrimp, crab, and oyster fleets.

Coast Guard officials have told our offices that closing Newport and Charleston Air Facilities would not result in a loss of search-and-rescue capability. They cite a nationwide two-hour response standard and claim to have more than enough assets in Oregon and South Carolina to conduct search-and-rescue missions within that two-hour window. Respectfully, however, there is a huge difference between search-and-rescue assets arriving on-scene in 25 minutes and those assets arriving on scene in 95 minutes. A few minutes often mean the difference between life and death in the waters off Newport and Charleston, which is why we have heard repeatedly from concerned constituents and local officials. We share this concern and are at a loss as to why the Coast Guard's national leadership did not consult with local leaders of either port prior to making this decision. Had officials done that, we believe the Coast Guard would likely have come to a different conclusion.

We know how seriously the Coast Guard takes its responsibility to protect our country's coasts, shores, and inland waterways. We also understand that the Coast Guard, like other federal agencies, is under pressure to reduce expenses in a tough funding climate. While we strongly support efforts to spend federal dollars more efficiently, we cannot support budget cuts that needlessly jeopardize the lives of our constituents. We therefore urge you to reevaluate the Coast Guard's decision and to prevent the Coast Guard from closing these air facilities.

We look forward to working with you on this important matter.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



Tim Scott  
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



Lindsey O. Graham  
United States Senator



Kurt Schrader  
Member of Congress



Mark Sanford  
Member of Congress



Peter DeFazio  
Member of Congress



Duncan Hunter  
Member of Congress



Suzanne Bonamici  
Member of Congress



Tom Rice  
Member of Congress



Earl Blumenauer  
Member of Congress