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THE WICKER REPORT

By: United States Senator Roger Wicker

Wicker Focuses on Naval Readiness

New Bill Addresses Needed Reforms in the Wake of Last Year's Fatal Collisions

of the Navy's Arleigh Burkewith two commercial ships in the Pacific. The first of those collisions involved the USS Fitzgerald off the coast of Japan, taking the lives of seven U.S. sailors. The second involved the USS John McCain near Singapore and took 10 lives. Repairing the extensive damages to these vessels is estimated to cost upwards of half a billion dollars. The tragic loss of life cannot be measured.

The Navy has conducted investigations into the incidents, concluding they were preventable. The collision report it released last November pointed to a lapse in operating procedures, inadequate training, crew fa- administrative

Over the course of about tigue, and errors made by the 10 weeks last summer, two ship's leadership. These are troubling findings, and they class destroyers collided illustrate the tragic consequences of the stress put on our Navy in recent years. We are asking our sailors to do more with fewer ships and fewer training opportunities.

Shortly after the collision report was made public, the Navy released its Strategic Readiness Review, a rigorous independent evaluation of the entire fleet's operations and organization stretching back three decades. The review's recommendations for readiness included the need to meet supply needs, reform chains of command, and support a culture of continued learning.

Reforms to Match Recommendations

The Navv can take some steps

strengthen readiness protect our sailors from avoidable accidents at sea. However, congressional action is necessary. Congress has a role in funding the ships and equipment that our military needs. As Chairman of the Senate Seapower Subcommittee, I have introduced a bill to match the Navy's readiness recommendations with the immediate implementation of reforms. The conditions that contributed to the USS Fitzgerald and USS John McCain must end.

"Surface Warfare Enhancement Act" would target maintenance practices, training, and personnel management. For example, surface warfare officers would need to meet certain training requirements before assuming critical posts on ships. In addition, the Navy would create more accurate projections for crew workloads and the maintenance of ships. Ship maintenance would have more oversight, and the Navy would have more flex-

More specifically,

ibility in the use of its maintenance funds. Chains of command would be subject to intense review.

Our Sailors Need More Ships Efforts to improve naval

readiness go hand in hand with efforts to modernize and expand our fleet. The number of ships has a direct impact on the ability of our sailors to fulfill their missions. These readiness challenges and the Navy's call for more ships led to the creation of the "SHIPS Act" that I introduced with Congressman Rob Wittman (R-Va.). Thankfully, Congress and the President recognized the urgent need to act now if we want to build a fleet capable of advancing our national interests amid growing threats. The "SHIPS Act" was signed into law last year, making it our national policy to meet the Navy's force structure requirement of 355 ships.

With only 281 ships currently in the Navy's fleet, we have a long way to go to meet even this minimum require-

IN AND AROUND EXINGTON

Lexington Celementene son was funeralized Sat- Mid-Winter Conference in urday, February 24 at the Tupelo, MS. Several people Multi-Purpose Building.

The seniors at the Seniors tended. Citizens Feeding Center in the Multi-Purpose Build- buses (Mississippi Valley ing in Lexington had a short State University transporta-Black History program on tion) have a new bus driver, Tuesday, February 27. Vari- Mr. Mitchell "Mitch" Truous seniors told about inci- itt. I hope I got his name dents that happened to them right. Mr. Arthur Runnels, during the days of Civil the former driver, says his Rights.

The fourth weekend in ularly.

ment. But the heartbreaking that exist in the training and lessons of the USS Fitzger- resources available to our ald and USS John McCain sailors. Their missions be-

Alderwoman February the Alcorn State Redmond's University Alumni held its from Holmes County at-

The Holmes County city riders will still see him reg-

are ones we must heed, rec- gin with preparedness here ognizing the shortcomings at home.

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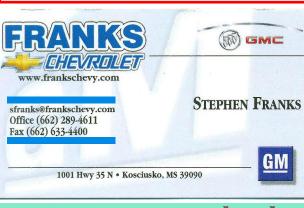


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