

Maine & New Hampshire Congressional Delegations Unite in Joint Effort to Create New Jobs at Portsmouth Naval Shipyard

Wednesday, January 14 2009

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, the entire Maine and New Hampshire congressional delegations united in a joint effort to create new, good-paying jobs at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard (PNS) in Kittery, Maine. In a letter to the Secretary of the Navy and the Chief of Naval Operations, the bipartisan group of lawmakers urged the U.S. Department of Navy to increase the permanent workforce at the Maine-based shipyard to help mitigate weakness in the regional labor market and increase overall employee productivity and quality of life.

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“The cadre of nearly 4,000 journeymen, engineers and support personnel at PNS is recognized as the most efficient shipyard workforce in the nation,” the group wrote. “We are convinced that increasing their ranks will enhance the unmatched performance standard and cost-effectiveness set by the PNS, and reduce the dependence on overtime to meet unanticipated workload demands.”

A recent report by the Rand Corporation found that PNS has the highest overtime rates of all public shipyards, signaling a shortage in the workforce. According to the report, an increase in workers at the public shipyard could result in increased productivity at a lower cost than other management techniques, such as overtime, temporary or borrowed workers. The report further affirmed that in order to keep pace with shipyard retirements -- 50 percent of the workforce will be eligible for retirement within the next 10 years --PNS must hire 190 new employees every year for the next five years.

Today, the Maine and New Hampshire congressional delegations called on the Department of Navy to heed the recommendations of the report saying the new jobs would further enhance and contribute to an already strong and high-performing workforce.

“As the private sector sheds extraordinarily capable craftsmen as a result of the current economic environment, the Navy should take a leadership role to ensure that these professionals and their talents, which have been developed through decades of training and experience, are not lost forever as a national resource,” the members concluded. “We strongly believe that it will benefit the Navy significantly to preserve and leverage the abilities of these professionals by bringing them to the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard as quickly as possible.”

Signatories of the letter included: Senators Olympia J. Snowe (R-Maine); Susan Collins (R-Maine); Judd Gregg (R-NH); Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH); and U.S. Reps. Chellie Pingree (D-Maine); Michael Michaud (D-Maine); Carol Shea-Porter (D-NH) and Paul Hodes (D-NH).

*Full copy of the letter follows:

January 13, 2009

The Honorable Donald C. Winter

Secretary of the Navy

1000 Navy Pentagon

Washington, DC 20350-1000

Admiral Gary Roughead

Chief of Naval Operations

1000 Navy Pentagon

Washington, DC 20350-1000

Dear Secretary Winter and Admiral Roughead:

We write today to urge the Department of the Navy to begin an aggressive hiring program to increase the government civilian workforce at Portsmouth Naval Shipyard (PNS) in Kittery, Maine. The cadre of nearly 4,000 journeymen, engineers and support personnel at PNS is recognized as the most efficient shipyard workforce in the nation. We are convinced that increasing their ranks will enhance the unmatched performance standard and cost-effectiveness set by the PNS, and reduce the dependence on overtime to meet unanticipated workload demands.

A recent study by researchers at the Rand Corporation strongly supports an aggressive hiring program at the shipyard. In their report, "U.S. Navy Shipyards: An Evaluation of Workload- and Workforce-Management Practices," the Rand Corporation found that increasing the size of the shipyard workforce would reduce the "excessive reliance" on overtime, which, according to the report, is a clear indicator that the shipyard workforce is undermanned.

The benefits to the Navy of increasing the workforce at PNS are clear. Increasing the workforce will increase the availability of submarines to the operational fleet, reduce costs resulting from emergency repairs or unplanned maintenance, and enhance project execution time. Unexpected repairs and unpredictable changes in work scope have dramatically increased the reliance on overtime to mitigate delays, increasing costs and, if resourcing routine activities, reducing overall employee performance.

The monthly average and peak overtime rates at the PNS were 40% and 65%, respectively, the highest of all of the public shipyards, and well in excess of the 10 to 15% overtime considered an effective management practice. The Rand Corporation concluded that it is more cost-effective and productive for the Navy to meet workloads through increases in the workforce rather than utilizing overtime, hiring temporary employees, or temporarily borrowing workers from other shipyards.

The Rand report also affirmed the need to begin an aggressive hiring program due to the increasing age of the workforce. At PNS, nearly 50 percent of the workforce will be eligible for retirement within the next decade. To replace this workforce, PNS must hire 190 employees every year over the next five years. Increases in the workforce will achieve improved levels of cohesion between conducting maintenance and employee training, which will enhance the skill sets and safety of the total workforce. These benefits will positively contribute to an already strong and high-performing workforce that continually exceeds the expectations and requirements of the operational Navy.

With such high performance standards in the submarine community, it is understandable that the submarine maintenance workforce must be composed of craftsman of the highest caliber. As the private sector sheds extraordinarily capable craftsmen as a result of the current economic environment, the Navy should take a leadership role to ensure that these professionals and their talents, which have been developed through decades of training and experience, are not lost forever as a national resource. We strongly believe that it will benefit the Navy significantly to preserve and leverage the abilities of these professionals by bringing them to the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard as quickly as possible.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

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