

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 14, 2016

The Honorable Raymond E. Mabus, Jr.
Secretary of the Navy
1000 Navy Pentagon, Room 4E686
Washington, DC 20350-1000

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We write to you today to express our concern with the Navy's dependency on electronic devices for navigation. This February, it was reported that the Navy finally returned to teaching celestial navigation skills to its commissioned sailors.ⁱ However, despite this step forward, the Navy still fails to mandate basic celestial training for its enlisted personnel and alarmingly lacks a requirement for U.S. Navy ships to keep updated paper charts aboard at all times.ⁱⁱ

As you know, Global Positioning Systems, and many other electronic devices used today, are increasingly targeted by our adversaries. Additionally, the satellites they depend on are also susceptible to damage or inaccuracies due to naturally occurring phenomena, like emissions from the sun known as space weather. This vulnerability to failure directly threatens the safety and security of our sailors. As the Sergeant Major of the Army stated in his recent efforts to return soldiers to their navigational roots "It's pretty tough to mess with a map, a protractor, a pencil and a compass."ⁱⁱⁱ We owe it to our sailors, enlisted and officer, to ensure these skills are being taught and our sailors are being held to the highest standard before we send them to the fleet. It is imperative that this standard is kept throughout the service.

The Army and Marine Corps both have started to take increased steps to enforce basic navigational skills for their personnel, and we ask today for the Navy follow suit. Earlier this year, the Commandant of the Marine Corps stated "We have a generation of Marines that have grown up assuming that the electromagnetic spectrum would be there for them; that they would turn on their gear and it would work 100 percent of the time, and it would be accurate."^{iv} We would argue sailors today have the same assumptions.

We ask that you report back to us as soon as possible about any support the Navy may need in order to enforce the basic training in navigational skills for its sailors, and we request an update on what steps the Navy will be taking to ensure its sailors are properly trained in this area. Though celestial and nautical navigation skills are more challenging to acquire, they are absolutely critical for our sailors who find themselves aboard ships in geographically desolate locations.

Sincerely,



Joni K. Ernst
United States Senator



Gary Peters
United States Senator

ⁱ <http://www.npr.org/2016/02/22/467210492/u-s-navy-brings-back-navigation-by-the-stars-for-officers> NPR, February, 2016.

ⁱⁱ <http://www.doncio.navy.mil/chips/ArticleDetails.aspx?ID=3167> Interview with Deputy Navigator of the Navy, December 2005.

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.armytimes.com/story/military/2016/07/05/back-basics-army-dials-up-traditional-soldiering-once-again/86005952/> Army Times, July 2016

^{iv} <http://www.marinecorpstimes.com/story/military/2016/02/11/commandant-marines-get-out-your-map-and-your-compass/80241766/> Marine Corps Times, February 2016.