

'Culture Trumps Everything,' SECNAV Nominee Says



Sailors assigned to the USS Theodore Roosevelt return on May 2 after the ship was cleaned following an outbreak of COVID-19 that infected hundreds of crew, hospitalized some and killed one Sailor. Navy Secretary nominee Kenneth J. Braithwaite on May 7 cited the Roosevelt crisis as a failing of Navy leadership. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Alexander Williams/Released)

WASHINGTON – The nominee to be the next Navy secretary said the sea service needs a course correction to restore the culture of leadership and accountability that has suffered in recent controversies, saying that “culture trumps everything.”

“It saddens me to say: the Department of the Navy is in troubled waters due to many factors, primarily the failure of leadership,” Kenneth J. Braithwaite, the U.S. ambassador to Norway and the president’s nominee to be the 77th Navy secretary, said during testimony May 7 at his confirmation hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Braithwaite said failings over the past few years – such as the “Fat Leonard” scandal, the fatal at-sea collisions in 2017, recent judicial missteps and the COVID-19 crisis aboard the USS Theodore Roosevelt – were “indicative of a breakdown in the trust of those leading the service.”

Lessons he said he took from his earlier experience as a naval aviator that the Navy Department is “resilient” and that “it all starts with culture.”

“Successful organizations have a strong culture, which always starts with leadership,” he said. “Culture is one thing that

creates for an organization a sense of belonging, a sense of good order and discipline.”

“It is my No. 1 priority, if I’m confirmed, to restore the appropriate culture in the United States Navy,” Braithwaite said. “A culture exists; I won’t say it’s been broken; I think it’s been tarnished.”

He stressed the importance of empowering people up and down the chain of command and that he would not intervene in the chain of command.