

Navy League Congressional Fly-In Makes Successful In-Person Return to Capitol Hill



Rep. Joe Courtney (D-Connecticut) discusses sea service issues with Navy League National President Christopher Townsend and CEO Mike Stevens during the Congressional Fly-In. *James Peterson*

Navy League members from councils around the country visited the offices of dozens of lawmakers on Capitol Hill on Wednesday as part of the first in-person Congressional Fly-In held since 2019.

They came to discuss the needs of the sea services with members of the House of Representatives and Senate, and to touch base with lawmakers and staff that represent their council regions during more than 100 meetings.

The messages included calling for funding two Virginia-class submarines in fiscal year 2025 and writing a "SHIPS Act," modeled on the CHIPS Act that helped restore microchip manufacturing and production capacity in the United States. The Navy League visitors also called for an annual shipbuilding and conversion budget of at least \$35 billion.



Rep. Rob Wittman (R-Virginia) talks with Christopher Townsend. *James Peterson*

The council members also discussed the need to fund the sea services' unfunded priorities, including barracks restoration and modernization for the Marine Corps, icebreakers and new cutters for the Coast Guard and defending the Jones Act for the U.S.-flag Merchant Marine.

They also educated lawmakers and their staffs on the need to

create future Sailors, Marines and Mariners by supporting the Sea Cadets, Young Marines and funding for the state Maritime Academies' student incentive programs.

On the eve of the fly-in, the Navy League notched a major victory for its advocacy work as the House Armed Services Committee voted to include funding for a second Virginia-class submarine in its upcoming National Defense Authorization Act markup.

"We had a great time," Sinclair Harris, retired rear admiral and national vice president of the Navy League, said at the end of the day. "We had six visits, one with a member of Congress, the rest were staffers, but all of them were very engaged, they all understood the importance of what the Navy League does and supports and educates and advocates for."

Sara Fuentes, who led a group of council members representing the Southern Region, said, "what makes the Navy League so unique and special is that anyone can get behind our issues because they benefit all Americans. It was a real pleasure to meet with Democrats, to meet with Republicans, all different kinds of offices, inland, coastal, and have them all understand and support our sea services and understand the need to really invest in them."



Members of the Southern Region meet with Sen. Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-Mississippi), second from left. *Sara Fuentes*

Scott Maguire, a board member of the Portland-Blueback Council, said his team made eight visits to House and Senate members, and "they were very receptive to what we had to say and seemed supportive, so I'm looking forward to their approvals on what we have suggested."

Merilyn Wong and William Stephens of the Marin County Council said they visited their local representative and convinced him to become a co-sponsor of the Pay Our Coast Guard Parity Act, which ensures Coast Guardsmen are compensated for their work

during government shutdowns.

“Every staff person was very receptive, interested in our presentation, wanted to learn a little bit more about it. We kept telling them about the Center for Maritime Strategy, to take advantage of that, something they didn’t really know, so that was helpful,” said Michele Langford, Pacific Central Region president.

Navy League National President Christopher “Towny” Townsend said “it was a fantastic day. We got to execute one of our primary missions of advocating for our sea services here in person in the halls of Congress.

COVID-19 restrictions put a hold on events like the Congressional Fly-In, but Townsend said it was a good time to come back in person “and spread the Navy League gospel, talk about the needs of the sea services.”