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March 2, 2009

Admiral Gary Roughead, USN
Chief of Naval Operations
2000 Navy Pentagon
Washington, DC 20350-2000

Dear Admiral Roughead:

Knowing your deep pride in the history of the United States Navy, I write today to ask for your strong support in preserving of one of our nation's most unique vessels: NR-1.

NR-1, as you well know, is a one-of-a-kind naval asset that has played an important role in search, recovery, geological survey, oceanographic research, and classified military missions over the past 40 years. Built at Electric Boat and stationed at Naval Submarine Base New London for her entire service life, NR-1 is a key part of the heritage of southeastern Connecticut —the "Submarine Capitol of the World." NR-1 is also an irreplaceable part of the history of our Navy and the Submarine Force, and an educational and historical asset that should be should be shared with the nation and the world.

As you know, the Navy's current plan calls for defueling NR-1 at Portsmouth Naval Shipyard this year and transporting the vessel to the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard and Intermediate Maintenance Facility around spring 2010. Once at Puget Sound, NR-1 will be placed in waterborne storage until approximately Fiscal Year 2015, when the reactor compartment will be removed from the hull for disposal. The remaining non-nuclear sections of the hull, including the forward 60 foot hull and superstructure containing the crew and control compartments, would be available in 2017 for possible preservation or recycling.

Given the vessel's long and close association with southeastern Connecticut, there is no doubt that NR-1 belongs in Groton alongside other notable pieces of the history of the submarine force, such as the USS Nautilus (SSN 571). In August 2008, the Navy received a letter from the Submarine Force Library and Museum Association (SMLFA) requesting the donation of the remaining NR-1 hull components to the Submarine Force Library and Museum for exhibition, as well as assistance in acquiring critical pieces of equipment of historic value —detailed in a comprehensive list accompanying their letter —for preservation. My letter strongly reaffirms both their request and my desire for the museum to be the eventual home of NR-1—both of her components and, eventually, the remaining pieces of her hull.

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The dismantling of NR-1 cannot simply be "business as usual." With the vessel now at Portsmouth, I think it absolutely critical that the relevant program offices, Naval Historical Center, and Submarine Force museum officials be on the same page as to the process for ensuring that as much of NR-1 as is possible be preserved and transferred to the museum. In the near term, it is important for the museum and museum association to be fully engaged on the steps that the Navy, NHC and Portsmouth Naval Shipyard are taking to meet their request for the transfer of NR-1's components as they are removed from the vessel.

In the longer term, there is no question that having as much of the actual hull of the NR-1 at the museum for visitors to view and explore would be a valuable enhancement the facility's core mission of collecting, preserving and interpreting the history of the submarine force. However, under the current NR-1 inactivation process, there is a high cost potentially associated with transporting the remaining non-nuclear hull section(s) back to the east coast from Puget Sound to the museum for preservation. This reality will remain a serious roadblock to the museum association's goal of preserving one of our Navy's most unique vessels.

Despite these challenges, I hope you will agree that losing the chance to preserve NR-1 for future generations would be a disappointing, and ultimately unnecessary, loss of a one-of-a-kind piece of history. The museum association is working to develop and raise funds for a new exhibit to support NR-1 and her unique components. However, in order to plan appropriately, as well as demonstrate the viability of this effort to the appropriate local, state, federal and private stakeholders, the museum association will need a better understanding of which components they could potentially have access to and when. To that end, I respectfully urge you and the appropriate offices within the Navy to work with my office, the museum and the museum association to determine whether the museum can become the home of the remaining NR-1 hull pieces and, if so, what steps need to be taken to facilitate the timely and cost-effective cross-country transfer of NR-1's remaining non-nuclear hull components from Puget Sound to the museum for preservation and display.

Southeastern Connecticut is proud to be the "Submarine Capitol of the World," and we look forward to one day seeing NR-1 come home once again. Thank you for your attention to this important matter and the Navy's assistance thus far. I look forward to continuing to work with the Navy and stakeholders in Connecticut to achieve our shared goal of properly honoring and preserving the legacy of NR-1, her 40-year service to our nation and all those who served aboard her.

Sincerely,

Joe Courtney

JOE COURTNEY
Member of Congress