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IN HONOR OF THE SESQUICENTENNIAL OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF

CONNECTICUT'S NAVY INSTALLATION

HON. JOSEPH D. COURTNEY
OF CONNECTICUT
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
April 11, 2018

MR. SPEAKER: I rise today, in honor of the Sesquicentennial of Connecticut's Navy installation. On April 11, 1868, one hundred and fifty years ago today, a Deed of Gift from the State of Connecticut and the City of New London was signed, conveyed, and presented to Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles, himself a native of Glastonbury, Connecticut.

The suitability of New London Harbor as a possible site for an established Navy base or depot had been discussed as early as 1799, but it was not until 1862 when a naval committee began considering possible locations for such a base. Instead of choosing a competing location, southeastern Connecticut's Congressman Augustus Brandegee succeeded in inserting language into the 1867 Naval Appropriations Act which directed the Secretary of the Navy "to accept a deed of gift when offered by the State of Connecticut." Following a scouting visit by Commodore J.P. McInstry, the land along the eastern side of the Thames River, straddling the towns of Groton and Ledyard, was selected as the desired location. The local New London Navy Yard Committee, led by John Rogers Bolles, purchased all or portions of three large farms and other adjoining parcels to compose that initial gift of land.

The footprint of that nascent naval base was only 5,200 feet long and 700 feet wide, but the base slowly expanded as it served in the dry-docking of ships and then as a coaling station. Between 1868 and 1912, the New London Navy Yard supported a diverse range of missions, including berthing inactive Civil War-era ironclad warships and refueling naval vessels traveling in New England waters.

The installation's beginnings as the "Home of the Submarine Force" can be traced to 1900, when the Navy acquired its first submarine, USS HOLLAND, for a sum of \$160,000. In 1912, Congress rejected the Navy's proposal to close the New London Navy Yard, following an impassioned effort by eastern Connecticut Congressman Edwin W. Higgins, one of my predecessors in this office. During that debate, he stated that the "action proposed is not only unjust but unreasonable and unsound as a military proposition." He was right, and thankfully he prevailed in ensuring that the base remained open. New London then became the homeport for six submarines in October 1915, as well as the first ship built specifically as a submarine tender, USS FULTON, which arrived that November.

One-hundred and fifty years after its humble beginnings, Naval Submarine Base New London has grown to occupy more than 680 acres along the east side of the Thames River, with more than 160 major facilities, 15 nuclear fast-attack submarines, and more than 70 tenant commands and activities, including the Submarine Learning Center, Naval Submarine School, the Naval Submarine Medical Research Laboratory, the Naval Undersea Medical Institute, and the newly established Undersea Warfighting Development Center.

Every day, our deployed undersea Sailors conduct intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance missions along coastlines across the globe, track the movements of adversary navies, and deter threats to our homeland. While SUBASE New London has grown in size and importance, and the technology aboard submarines has evolved, the men and women who crew these vessels have constantly served with Honor, Courage, and Commitment.

In 1912, Congressman Higgins told his colleagues in Congress that "Connecticut stands ready, as she always has, to bear her part of the burdens of the national defense." This remains as true today as it was in 1912 or even in 1868. My state is proud to be home of our nation's "first and finest" submarine base, and I ask all my colleagues to join me in honoring this important milestone for Connecticut, for our nation, and for all those who serve, and have served, at Naval Submarine Base New London.