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Duncan Hunter
U.S. House of Representatives
50th District, California

March 28, 2014

The Honorable Ray Mabus
Secretary of the Navy
1000 Navy Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20350-1000

Dear Secretary Mabus:

As consideration is given to potentially banning tobacco sales on Navy bases and ships, I want to express my strong opposition to this idea. A decision to remove tobacco products from military sales venues would surely prompt similar consideration by all services and therefore limit—and in some cases restrict—access to legal products that servicemen and women choose to purchase on their own. Also a factor is the guaranteed drop in profits for the Navy Exchange Services Command.

While I recognize the Navy believes removing tobacco products would help in “maximizing the readiness” of sailors and Marines, it’s my belief that the Navy should worry less about intruding on the personal decision-making of these same sailors and Marines, while creating added burdens in the process. Instead, the Navy should focus on truly strengthening readiness through training, resources and management. In the era of sequestration, this is even more important for both the Navy and Congress, and I personally struggle to understand how a decision to remove tobacco sales on bases and ships will better prepare the Navy for the threats of the future, the pivot to the Pacific or even meeting basic requirements under the law.

Overall, removing tobacco sales is perceived more as a political decision, intended to make a point, than it is a decision that supports our sailors and Marines—regardless of personal feelings on the individual and legal use of tobacco products. Having spent time around Marines and sailors through multiple deployments, I believe there are far more immediate priorities for the Navy and the Marine Corps, all of which require your leadership and attention.

Thank you for the opportunity to express these thoughts and concerns. If you wish to discuss the matter further, please know that I’m always available.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Duncan Hunter". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Duncan Hunter
Member of Congress