

Navy League Fly In Focuses Federal Attention on Sea Services



Navy League National President Christopher Townsend, right, speaks with Rep. Rob Wittman of Virginia during the Fly In. *Photo credit: James Peterson*

Members of the Navy League of the United States fanned out across congressional buildings on May 7 as part of the second consecutive “Anchors Aweigh Fly In” to help educate lawmakers and their staff about the needs of the men and women of the sea services.

Luke Lorenz, the senior director of legislative affairs at the Navy League, said nearly 60 members from around the country participated in the Fly In, a significant step up from the 40 who took part last year, when the annual effort was restarted in the wake of COVID.

They came from all over the country, as far away as California, representing the Navy League's different regions, he said.

The Navy Leaguers briefed lawmakers and their staff on a variety of issues, including the importance of passing regular appropriations bills instead of relying on continuing resolutions that freeze federal spending at last year's levels. For many agencies, including the Department of Defense, that amounts to a cut as it doesn't account for inflation.

Bolstered by a new report from the Congressional Budget Office, the Navy Leaguers advocated for at least a \$40 billion annual Navy shipbuilding and conversion budget to get to a 355-ship manned fleet, as well as \$10 billion annually to build an uncrewed fleet.

They also advocated for a \$20 billion Coast Guard budget (up from less than \$13.5 billion in fiscal 2024) and touted workforce development pipeline programs such as the Sea Cadets and Young Marines.

Last but not least, the group sought co-sponsors for the SHIPS for America Act, which would revitalize the U.S. shipbuilding and commercial maritime industries. Creating such an act was a chief goal of the Fly In last year; now that it has been introduced, the Navy Leaguers called for support and passage.



Nearly 60 Navy League members took part in the 2025 Fly In.
Photo credit: James Peterson

“Today was a great day. It’s always a privilege to spend time with my fellow Navy Leaguers who fly down here on their own dime, taking time off from work and their busy lives, to advocate for our sea services, the Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard and U.S.-flag Merchant Marine,” said board member Sara Fuentes.

“It’s really inspiring to see how they’re able to move the ball forward in terms of our sea service priorities. Last year we were here asking Congress to consider a SHIPS for America Act and today we are here asking for that SHIPS for America Act to have cosponsors. So, it’s amazing to see the progress we’ve already been able to make within one year thanks to the passion, dedication and service of Navy League members.”

After the busy day, members reported to National President Chris “Towny” Townsend they heard support for the SHIPS Act and the sea services during their meetings, and members were pleased the message was non-partisan.

Townsend said the event was “bittersweet” for him, as the Fly In is his last as national president, but said, “As always, it’s great to see our members engage, to execute on of our most important mission pillars, which is to advocate on behalf of our sea services, our sea service members and their families. And I saw that in full display today.”

Resonating Messages

Hampton Dowling, of the Mid-Atlantic Council in Northern Virginia, said although he is a life member, the Fly In was his first event with the Navy League – and it won’t be the last.

He said the staffers he spoke with felt the SHIPS for America Act was something that needs to happen and were impressed that the Navy League is one of the driving forces behind it.

“To have such a definitive statement by staffers on a rather uncommon subject matter – and the bill is about as complex as an octopus – I was really impressed. I was very optimistic,” he said.

Retired Navy Commander Jim Semerad met with a variety of lawmakers and staffers, from Republican Rep. Pete Sessions of Texas to Michigan Democrat Rashida Tlaib, and said the message resonated well on both sides of the aisle.

Semerad said Sessions even “commandeered” him to address Sessions’ staff and educate them about the Navy League and its issues, and Tlaib was “very excited that I showed up” and came out of her office to speak with him.

“People wanted to do the right thing when it comes to the Navy’s and the sea services’ budget,” he said, including for keeping commercial shipping lanes open.

“This was a very positive experience,” Semerad said. “I would encourage everybody from the Navy League: Put on your

comfortable shoes, wear tennis shoes if necessary, and come to Washington, D.C. and have the experience of passing on the Navy's message. You'll feel good about it and the legislators feel good about it, too."