

## **Navy Times**

### **Senators Encourage Navy on Tobacco Sales Ban**

Karen Jowers, April 3, 2014

Five Democratic senators have written to Navy Secretary Ray Mabus encouraging him to ban the sale of tobacco products on bases and ships.

Other lawmakers are opposing the idea, which is under consideration by Mabus and other Navy officials and has been encouraged by Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel.

Three Republican members of Congress have written to House Appropriations Committee leaders asking for language to be included in the 2015 defense appropriations bill that would prohibit DoD or any service branch from implementing any policy or regulation that would limit or prohibit troops' access to legal tobacco products.

According to sources in and outside the Pentagon, the Navy is moving toward eliminating tobacco sales on Navy and Marine Corps bases and ships. Changes may be coming to the other services, too, as DoD reviews its tobacco policies. A DoD memo dated March 14 seems to encourage the services to eliminate tobacco sales — and even tobacco use — on military bases, while stopping short of ordering specific actions.

The senators noted that the high rate of tobacco use by active-duty troops “is not only harmful to their health, but also costs the federal government significantly in the long term.” They noted that annual profits from all DoD-authorized tobacco sales are about \$90 million, but that health costs and lost productivity costs are about 21 times greater than annual sales.

“We urge you to do everything in your capacity to address this issue for our military men and women, including moving forward with the proposal to stop the sale of tobacco aboard all naval bases and ships,” states the March 28 letter, signed by Sens. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn.; Richard Durbin, D-Ill.; Tom Harkin, D-Iowa; Jack Reed, D-R.I.; and Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio.

In a March 27 interview with Military Times, Mabus said he and his senior staff are taking a “deliberate approach” in considering a “whole range” of initiatives regarding tobacco, although he didn't offer specifics.

The senators wrote that officials should ensure that enough support is always available to personnel seeking to quit tobacco use, including existing efforts to offer tobacco cessation products and services.

“We recognize, support and thank you for your recent efforts to increase smoke-free areas on bases, eliminate smoking on submarines, and improve access to cessation services,” the senators wrote.

In an April 2 letter to the House Appropriations Committee leaders, Reps. Duncan Hunter, R-Calif.; Richard Hudson, R-N.C.; and Tom Rooney, R-Fla., wrote that “given

the current fiscal climate, the strain on the Navy to conduct global operations, the impending reduction to the size of the fleet and personnel, recent efforts to restrict access to tobacco products is a frivolous abdication of more urgent matters of national security.”

They said they support the services’ other efforts to provide troops incentives to stop smoking.

“Last year alone, tobacco sales in Navy exchanges decreased by 12 percent, indicating considerable success through DoD’s existing cessation program,” they wrote.

<http://www.navytimes.com/article/20140403/NEWS/304030067/Senators-encourage-Navy-potential-tobacco-sales-ban>